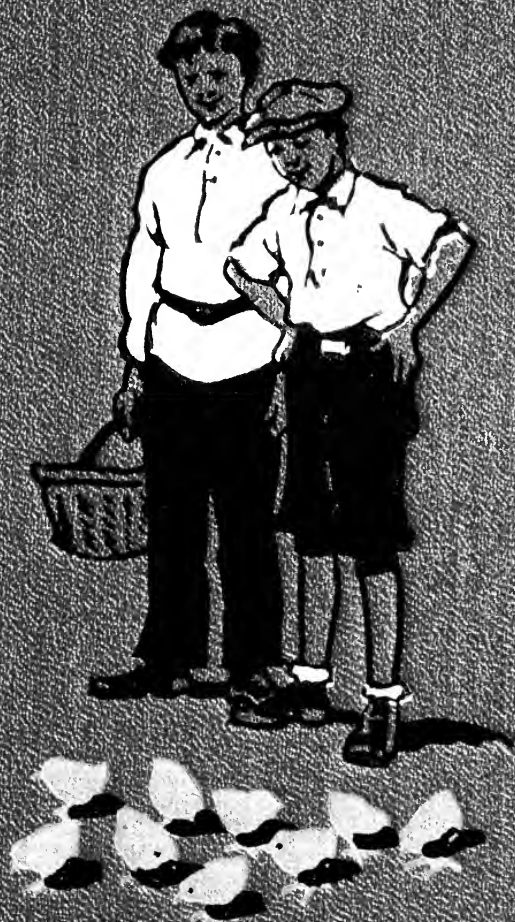




H. NOSOV



JOLLY FAMILY



SOVIET LITERATURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

N. NOSOV



JOLLY FAMILY



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

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JOLLY FAMILY



IMPORTANT DECISION

This happened when the steam-engine, which Mishka and I had tried to make out of a tin can, blew up. Mishka let the water in the can get too hot and it burst and the steam burnt his hand. Lucky for him his mother smeared some naphtha ointment on it right away. That's a wonderful remedy. Try it yourself if you don't believe me. But be sure to rub it on as soon as you burn yourself, or else the skin will come off.

Well, after our steam-engine blew up, Mishka's mother wouldn't let us play with it any more and threw it into the dust-bin. For a while we couldn't think of anything to do and it was awfully dull.

It was the beginning of spring. The snow was melting everywhere. The water ran in little streams in the gutters. The bright spring sun shone in through the windows. But Mishka and I were in the dumps. We are a funny pair—we aren't happy unless we've got something to do. And when we haven't anything to do we sit around and mope and mope until we find something.

One day I came to see Mishka and found him sitting at the table poring over a book, with his head in his hands. He was so busy reading he didn't hear me come in. I had to bang the door hard before he looked up.

"Oh, it's you, Nikoladze," he said with a broad grin.

Mishka never calls me by my real name. Instead of calling me Kolya like everyone else, he invents all sorts of queer names for me such as Nikola, Mikola, Mikula Selyaninovich, or Miklukha-Maklai, and once he even called me Nikolaki. Every day I have to answer to a new name. But I don't mind so long as he likes it.

"Yes," I said, "it's me. What's that book you've got there?"

"A very interesting book," said Mishka, "I bought it this morning at a news-stand."

I glanced at it. The title was *Poultry Farming*. There was a picture of a hen and a cock on the cover, and on every page there were diagrams and drawings and pictures of chicken coops.

"What's interesting about it?" I said. "Looks to me like a scientific book of some kind."

"That's what makes it interesting. This isn't one of your silly fairytales. Everything in here is true. It's a useful book, that's what it is."

Mishka is the kind of chap who insists on everything being useful. Whenever he has a little pocket money he goes and buys something useful like this book. Once he bought a book called *Chebyshev's Inverse Trigonometric Functions and Polynomes*. Of course he couldn't understand a word, so he decided to put it away until he was clever enough to read it. It's been lying on the shelf ever since, waiting for Mishka to get clever.

He marked the page he was reading and closed the book.

"You can learn all sorts of things from this book," he said. "How to raise chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, everything."

“You’re not thinking of raising turkeys by any chance?”

“No, but I like to read about it just the same. It turns out you can make a machine called an incubator that hatches chickens all by itself without any hen.”

“Ha!” I said. “Everybody knows that. What’s more, I’ve seen one last year, when I was on the farm with Mother. It hatched five hundred or even a thousand chicks a day. They hardly had time to take them out.”

“Really!” said Mishka all excited. “I never knew about that. I thought only brood-hens could hatch chicks. I used to see lots of sitting-hens when we lived in the country.”

“Oh, I’ve seen plenty of them myself,” I said. “But an incubator is much better. A hen can only hatch a dozen eggs at a time, but an incubator can take a thousand at a time.”

“I know,” said Mishka. “That’s what it says in the book. And here’s another thing. A hen doesn’t lay eggs when she’s hatching her chicks and bringing them up, but if you have an incubator to hatch the chicks the hen can go on laying eggs.”

We set to work to figure out how many more eggs there would be if all the hens laid eggs instead of hatching chickens. It takes twenty-one days for a brood-hen to hatch chickens, and if you count the time she spends looking after them when they’re hatched you find that it takes about three months before she starts laying again.

“Three months, that’s ninety days,” said Mishka. “If the hen wasn’t busy hatching chickens she could lay ninety eggs more a year, even if she only laid one egg a day. For a small farm with even ten hens that would make nine hundred eggs a year. And if you take some big collective or state farm with a thousand hens, you’d have ninety thousand extra eggs. Think of it! Ninety thousand eggs!”

We spent quite a long time discussing the usefulness of incubators.

Then Mishka said: "I say, let's make a small incubator of our own and hatch a few eggs."

"How could we do that?" I asked. "I'm sure it isn't an easy thing to make."

"I don't think it's so hard," said Mishka. "The book tells you all about it. The main thing is to keep the eggs warm for twenty-one days running and then the chickens will hatch out by themselves."

Now, the thought of having little chicks of our own appealed to me tremendously. I am very fond of all kinds of birds and animals. Mishka and I joined the Young Naturalists' circle at school last autumn and worked a little with our pets, but then Mishka got the idea of making a steam-engine and so we stopped going to the circle. Vitya Smirnov, the monitor of the circle, told us he would cross us off the list of members if we didn't do any work, but we begged him to give us another chance.

Mishka tried to imagine how nice it would be when our chicks hatched out.

"They'll be such sweet little things," he said. "We can fix up a corner for them in the kitchen and they can live there and we'll feed them and take care of them."

"Yes, but we'll have plenty to do before that. Don't forget it takes three weeks for them to hatch out!" I said.

"What about it? All we have to do is to make the incubator, the chicks hatch out by themselves."

I thought it over for a while. Mishka looked at me anxiously. I saw that he was itching to get to work at once.

"All right," I said. "We haven't anything else to do anyhow. Let's have a shot at it."

"I knew you would agree!" Mishka cried joyfully. "I would have tackled it myself, but it wouldn't be half as much fun without you."

UNEXPECTED HITCH

"Perhaps we don't need to make an incubator. Let's just put the eggs in a saucepan and stand it on the stove," I proposed.

"Oh no, that would be no good at all," Mishka cried. "The fire would go out and the eggs would be spoiled. The thing about an incubator is that it keeps an even temperature all the time—102 degrees."

"Why 102 degrees?"

"Because that's the temperature of the brood-hen when she's sitting on her eggs."

"You mean to say hens have temperatures? I thought only human beings had temperatures when they were ill."

"Everybody has a temperature, silly, whether they're ill or not. Only when you're ill your temperature goes up."

Mishka opened the book and pointed to a drawing.

"See, that's what an incubator looks like. This is a tank for the water, and this little pipe here leads from the tank to the box where the eggs are. The tank is heated from underneath. The warm water runs through the pipe and heats the eggs. Look, there's the thermometer so you can keep watch on the temperature."

"Where are we going to get a tank from?"

"We don't need a tank. We can use an empty tin instead. We're only going to have a little incubator."

"How are we going to heat it?" I asked.

"With an ordinary paraffin-lamp. There's an old one lying in the shed somewhere."

We went to the shed and began rummaging among the rubbish piled up in the corner. There were old boots, galoshes, a broken umbrella, a good copper pipe, any amount of bottles and empty tin cans. We had gone through nearly the whole pile before I happened to notice the

lamp standing on a shelf. Mishka climbed up and took it down. It was covered with dust, but the glass was whole and to our great joy there was even a wick inside. We took the lamp, the copper pipe and a good-sized tin and carried them all to the kitchen.

First Mishka cleaned the lamp, filled it with paraffin and lit it to see how it worked. It burned quite well and you could turn the wick up and down to make the flame bigger or smaller as you pleased. We blew out the lamp and set to work on the incubator. To begin with, we made a large box out of plywood, big enough to hold about fifteen eggs. We lined it with cotton wool covered with a layer of felt to keep the eggs nice and warm. Then we made a lid for the box with an opening in it for the thermometer so we could watch the temperature. The next thing was to make the heater. We took the tin can and drilled two round holes in it, one on top and the other below. We soldered the pipe to the upper hole, made an opening in the side of the incubator box and stuck the pipe inside, bending it so as to pass the free end out again and solder it to the hole in the bottom of the can. The bent tube made a sort of radiator inside the box.

Now the lamp had to be placed so it would heat the tin can. Mishka fetched a plywood crate. We stood it up on end, cut a round hole on top and put the incubator on it so that the tin was right on top of the hole. The lamp went underneath.

At last everything was ready. We filled the tin with water and lit the lamp. The water in the tin and the pipe began to get warm. The mercury in the thermometer started to rise and before long it reached 102 degrees. It would have gone up still more if Mishka's mother had not come in just then.

"What are you two up to now? The whole place smells of paraffin!" she said.

"It's the incubator," Mishka said.

"What incubator?"

"You know, the kind that hatches chickens."

"Chickens? Whatever are you talking about?"

"Look, Mum, I'll show you how it's done. You put the eggs in here and this lamp here...."

"What's the lamp for?"

"To heat it with. You simply must have a lamp, otherwise it won't work."



"Nonsense, I'm not going to let you play with paraffin-lamps. You'll upset it and the paraffin will catch fire. No, no, I can't have it!"

"Please, Mum. We'll be very careful."

"No. I shan't let you play with lighted lamps. What next! First you go and scald yourself with boiling water and now you want to burn the house down!"

Mishka begged and pleaded with his mother, but it was no use.

Mishka was terribly upset. "Bang goes our incubator!" he said.

WE FIND A WAY OUT

That night I couldn't sleep for a long time. I lay awake for a whole hour thinking about our incubator. At first I thought of asking my mother to let us use the paraffin-lamp, but I soon saw that was no good because she is terribly afraid of fires and is always hiding the matches from me. What's more, Mishka's mother had taken the lamp away and wouldn't give it back to us for anything.

Everyone in the house was fast asleep, but I lay there racking my

brains. And suddenly a wonderful idea came into my head: why not try using an electric lamp to heat the water?

I got up quietly, switched on the desk lamp and tried it with my finger to see whether it was getting hot. It warmed up quickly and was soon so hot I couldn't keep my finger on it. I took the thermometer off the wall and put it against the lamp. The mercury shot up right to the very top. There was no doubt about it, the lamp gave plenty of heat.

Feeling better, I hung up the thermometer and went back to bed. The thermometer, by the way, never worked properly after that night. We found that out some time later. When it was cold in the room it would show 104 degrees above zero, and when it got a little warmer the mercury would climb all the way up to the very top and stay there until you shook it down. It never showed less than 86 degrees above, so that even in winter, going by that thermometer, we wouldn't need to heat the stove. I must have spoiled it when I put it against the lamp.

The next day I told Mishka about my idea. We decided to try it out at once. When we came home from school I got my mother to give us an old desk lamp that had been lying in the cupboard for ages, and we stood it in the box in place of the paraffin-lamp. Mishka stuck a few books under it to bring the bulb closer to the water tank. Then I switched it on and we started to watch the thermometer which Mishka had brought from home.

For a long time nothing happened. The mercury stood still. We were afraid nothing would come of our experiment. But after a while the water began to get warm and the mercury started to rise. In half an hour it had climbed to 102 degrees. Mishka clapped his hands in glee and shouted: "Hurrah, that's just the temperature we need for the chicks! Electricity is as good as paraffin after all!"

"Of course it is," I said. "In fact it's much better, because you can start fire with a paraffin-lamp but electricity is quite safe."

Just then we noticed that the mercury had moved up further and was now standing at 104 degrees.

"Hey," cried Mishka. "Look at that. It's gone way up."

"We've got to stop it somehow," I said.

"Yes, but how? If it was a paraffin-lamp you could turn down the wick."

"Electricity doesn't have wicks!"

"I don't think much of your electricity!" said Mishka, getting sore.

I got sore too. "My electricity? Why is it my electricity?"

"Well, it was your idea to use an electric lamp, wasn't it? Look, it's gone up to 108 degrees! If this goes on all the eggs will boil and there won't be any chicks."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Let's try lowering the lamp. Then it won't heat the water up so fast and the temperature will go down."

We pulled the thickest book from under the lamp and waited to see what would happen. The mercury crawled slowly downward until it reached 102 degrees. We sighed with relief.

"Now everything is all right," said Mishka. "We can start hatching the chicks right away. I'll ask Mother for some money and you run home and ask your mother for some. Then we'll put it together and buy a dozen eggs."

I ran home and asked Mother for money to buy eggs. Mother couldn't understand what I wanted eggs for and it was some time before I got her to understand that we needed them for our incubator.

"Nothing will come of it," said Mother. "It's no easy matter to hatch chicks without a hen. You'll only be wasting your time."

But I kept insisting until she gave in.

"All right," she said at last. "But where are you going to buy the eggs?"

"In the shop, of course," I said. "Where else?"

"Oh no, that won't do," said Mother. "You need new-laid eggs, otherwise they won't hatch."

I ran back to Mishka and told him.

"What a donkey I am," said Mishka. "Of course, that's what the book says too. I forgot."

We decided to go to the village not far from town where we had stayed the summer before. Aunt Natasha, the landlady, kept hens and we were sure to get new-laid eggs there.

THE NEXT DAY

Life is funny! Yesterday we hadn't dreamt of going anywhere and here we were in the train on our way to Aunt Natasha's village. We wanted to get those eggs as soon as possible and begin hatching the chicks, but the train seemed to crawl along just for spite, and the journey took an awful long time. It's always like that, I've noticed: whenever you're in a hurry everything goes slow on purpose. Besides, Mishka and I were worried that Aunt Natasha might be out when we arrived. What would we do then?

But everything turned out all right. Aunt Natasha was home. She was very glad to see us. She thought we had come to stay with her.

"We'd love to but we can't just now," said Mishka. "Not before the holidays."

"We've come on business," I said. "We want some eggs."

"What's the matter, aren't there any eggs to be had in town?" said Aunt Natasha.

"Yes, there are," said Mishka, "but, you see, we need fresh eggs."

"And can't you get fresh eggs in the shops?"

"When the hen lays eggs they don't go straight to the shop, do they?" asked Mishka.

"Well, not right away."

"There you are, you see," cried Mishka. "The eggs are collected until there are a lot of them and it may be a whole week or two weeks, perhaps, before they get to the shops."

"Well, what of it?" said Aunt Natasha. "Eggs don't spoil in two weeks."

"Oh, don't they! Our book says you can't hatch eggs that are more than ten days old."

"Oh, hatching! That's another matter," said Aunt Natasha. "Of course you need the very freshest eggs for that, but the eggs you eat can lie for even a month or two without spoiling. You're not going to keep hens, are you?"

"Yes. That's why we're here," I said.

"But how are you going to hatch the eggs?" asked Aunt Natasha. "You need a sitting-hen for that."

"No, we'll do it without a hen. We've made an incubator."

"An incubator? Gracious me! And what do you want with an incubator, I'd like to know?"

"We want to have little chicks."

"What for?"

"Oh, just for fun," said Mishka. "It's dull without chicks. You country-folk have everything—chickens, geese, cows, pigs. But we haven't got anything."

"Yes, but we live in the country. You can't very well keep cows in the city."

"Not cows, perhaps, but you could keep some sort of animals."

"Not in town. Too much trouble," said Aunt Natasha.

"There's a man in our house who keeps birds," said Mishka. "He has lots of cages with all kinds of birds—canaries, goldfinches and even starlings."



"Yes, but he keeps them in cages. You're not going to keep your chickens in cages, are you?"

"No, we'll keep them in the kitchen. We'll find a nice place for them, don't you worry. Just let us have the best eggs you can find, the very, very freshest, otherwise they won't hatch."

"Very well, you'll have them," said Aunt Natasha. "I know the kind you need. They'll be as fresh as can be."

Aunt Natasha went to the kitchen and came back with fifteen beautiful eggs, every one of them smooth and white without a single spot. Anyone could see they were fresh. She put them in our basket and covered them with a woollen shawl so they wouldn't cool down on the way.

"Well, good-bye and good luck to you," said Aunt Natasha, as she saw us off to the gate. It was beginning to get dark outside by now and Mishka and I hurried to the station.

It was very late by the time we got home and Mother gave me a good scolding. Mishka also got told off by his mother. But we didn't mind! What we minded most of all was that it was too late that night to begin hatching chickens and we had to put it off till next day.

THE BEGINNING

As soon as we came home from school next day we laid out the eggs in the incubator. There was plenty of room for all of them, even a little left over.

We put the lid on the incubator, placed the thermometer in the opening and were just about to switch on the lamp when Mishka said:

"Let's first make sure that we have done everything right. Perhaps we ought to warm up the incubator first and put the eggs in afterwards?"

"I don't know about that," I said. "Let's see what the book says."

Mishka got out the book and began reading. He read for a long time, then he said:

"You know, we very nearly suffocated them!"

"Suffocated who?"

"The eggs. It turns out they're alive."

"Alive?" I echoed in surprise.

"Yes. Here's what the book says: 'Eggs are living things, although there is no visible life in them. It is latent as yet. But when the egg is warmed, life awakens and the embryo begins to develop gradually, eventually emerging as a fledgling. Like all living beings eggs breathe...' See that? The eggs breathe just like you and me."

"Poppycok," I said. "You and me breathe through our mouths. But what do eggs breathe through?"

"We don't breathe through our mouths, we breathe through our lungs. The air gets to the lungs through the mouth, but eggs breathe

through their shells. The air passes through the shell and that's how they breathe."

"Well, let them breathe all they want," I said. "We're not stopping them, are we?"

"But how can they breathe in a box? When you breathe you exhale carbon dioxide. If you were shut up in a box you'd breathe out so much carbon dioxide that you'd suffocate after a while."

"Why should I get shut up in a box. I don't want to suffocate," I said.

"Well, neither do the eggs, and we've gone and shut them up in a box."

"What are we going to do about it?"

"We need ventilation," said Mishka. "All real incubators have ventilation."

We took all the eggs out of the box, taking care not to break any, and laid them in the basket. Then Mishka brought a drill and drilled several small holes in the incubator to let the carbon dioxide out.

When that was done, we put the eggs back and covered the box with the lid.

"Just a minute," said Mishka, "we don't know yet what you're supposed to do first—heat the incubator or put the eggs in."

He consulted the book again.

"We're all wrong again," he said after a while. "It says here that the air in the incubator must be moist, because if the air is dry the liquid inside the eggs will evaporate through the shell and the embryo can die. You have to put basins of water inside the incubator. The water evaporates and makes the air moist."

So we took all the eggs out again. We tried putting glasses of water inside, but they were too high and the lid wouldn't shut. We looked around for something smaller but we couldn't find anything. Then

Mishka remembered that his little sister Maya had a set of toy bowls made of wood.

"What if we take a couple of Maya's bowls?" he said.

"A good idea!" I said. "Go and get them."

Mishka found Maya's dishes and took four small wooden bowls. They turned out to be just the right size. We filled them with water and put them inside the incubator, one in each corner. But when we tried putting the eggs back again, we found that there was only room for twelve now. Three were left over.

"It doesn't matter," said Mishka. "Twelve chicks will be plenty. What do we need any more for? We'll need plenty of food for all of them as it is."

Just then Maya came in and when she saw her bowls in the incubator she set up a howl.

"Listen," I said, "we aren't taking them for keeps. In twenty-one days from now you'll get them back. If you like, we can give you three eggs for them now."

"What do I need eggs for? They're empty."

"No, they're not. They've got yolks and whites and everything else."

"But they haven't got chicks!"

"When the chicks hatch out, we'll give you one."

"Honest and truly?"



“Yes, yes. But run along now and don’t bother us. We’re having a hard enough time as it is, trying to figure out how to begin. We don’t know whether you put the eggs in first and then heat up the incubator or heat it up first and put the eggs in afterwards.”

Mishka consulted the book again and found that you could do it either way.

“All right,” I said. “Switch on the electricity and let’s get started.”

“I’m a little bit scared,” said Mishka. “I’ll tell you what. You’d better switch on the light, I’m always unlucky.”

“What makes you think that?”

“I’m just unlucky, that’s all. Nothing I do ever succeeds.”

“Same here,” I said. “I’m always having bad luck too.” We both began remembering all sorts of things that had happened to us in our lives, and it turned out that we were both terribly unlucky.

“It’s no use either of us starting a thing like this,” said Mishka. “It’s bound to be a failure.”

“Let’s ask Maya,” I said. Mishka called his sister in.

“Listen, Maya,” I said. “Are you lucky?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Have you ever had any failures in life?”

“Never.”

“Good! Now, see that lamp in the box?”

“Yes.”

“Well, go and plug in the cord.”

Mayka went over to the incubator and plugged in the cord.

“What else?” she asked.

“Nothing,” said Mishka. “Now run along and don’t bother us.”

Maya went off in a huff. We quickly put the lid on and began watching the thermometer. At first the mercury stood at 64 degrees

but gradually it began to rise until it reached 68 degrees. Then it went up a little faster to 77 degrees and when it got to 86 degrees it slowed down. In half an hour it rose to 95 degrees and then stopped. I put another book under the lamp and the mercury began to go up again. It climbed to 102 degrees and went on rising.

"Stop!" cried Mishka. "Look! It's up to 104. The book is too thick."

I pulled out the book and put in a thinner one. The mercury began to go down. It went down to 102 degrees and dropped still further.

"That one's too thin," said Mishka. "Wait, I'll bring an exercise book."

He ran for the exercise book and stuck it under the lamp. The mercury began to go up again, went up to 102 degrees and stopped. We kept our eyes glued to the thermometer. The mercury stood still.

"There," whispered Mishka. "We have to keep that temperature steady for twenty-one days. Think we can?"

"Of course we can," I said.

"Because if we don't, all our work will be for nothing."

"Of course we'll do it. Who said we won't!"

We sat beside our incubator all day long. We even did our lessons in the kitchen, keeping an eye on the thermometer all the time. It stood at 102 degrees.

"Everything's going fine," crowed Mishka. "If we keep it up we'll have our chicks in exactly twenty-one days. Think of it, twelve fluffy little chicks! What a jolly family they'll make!"

THE TEMPERATURE FALLS

I don't know about other boys but I like to sleep late on Sundays. On Sundays you don't have to go to school or rush off anywhere. Once a week a fellow can lie around in bed. There's nothing wrong in it, if

you ask me. The next day happened to be Sunday but for some reason I woke up very early. The sun wasn't up yet but it was already light. I was just about to turn over and go back to sleep when I suddenly remembered the incubator. I jumped out of bed, dressed quickly and ran over to Mishka's. Mishka opened the door himself.

"Shhhh," he hissed. "You'll wake everybody up. What's the idea of coming here so early in the morning, ringing the bell as if the house was on fire!"

He was in his night-shirt and his feet were bare.

"But you're up, aren't you?" I said.

"Up!" growled Mishka. "Haven't been to bed yet."

"Why not?"

"All because of that blinking incubator."

"Anything happened?"

"Keeps dropping."

"But why should it drop? It was standing pretty solid yesterday."

"Not the incubator, silly! I mean the temperature."

"Why should it drop?"

"That's what I'd like to know. When I went to bed everything was all right, but I couldn't fall asleep for a long time for thinking about our chicks. After a while I got up just to see how the incubator was getting along. I ran into the kitchen and, what do you think—the thermometer was down to 101 degrees! I stuck another book under the lamp right away and waited until the temperature went up to 102 degrees. It's a good thing I hadn't fallen asleep or our chicks would have been done for. Instead of going back to bed I decided to wait awhile and see what happened. I waited. One hour passed, two hours, and the temperature didn't change. I was tired of sitting around doing nothing, so I found a book and started to

read. But I got so interested in the story that I forgot all about the thermometer. And when I looked up it was down to 101 degrees again. It had dropped another degree! I put one more exercise book under the lamp and the temperature evened up again. You see, it's steady now, but you never can tell what it will do later on."

"You'd better go to bed now," I said. "I'll stay here and watch for a while."

"What's the use of going to bed now?" said Mishka. "It's broad daylight."

He tiptoed back to his room, brought his clothes and started to dress. He put on his trousers and shirt, laced up his boots, then lay down on the couch and fell asleep.

"I shan't wake him," I thought. "A fellow has to get some sleep sometime."

I sat down beside the incubator and began watching the thermometer. After a while I got tired of doing nothing, so I got the book about poultry farming and read the bit about incubators. It said that if the eggs lie in one position the embryo is liable to get stuck to the shell on the inside, and then the chicks will turn out deformed and misshapen, or else very weak and feeble. To prevent the embryo from sticking to the shell the eggs must be turned every three hours.

I opened the incubator and started turning the eggs. Just then Mishka woke up. When he saw I had opened the incubator he jumped up, shouting: "What the dickens are you doing!"

I got such a fright I nearly dropped one of the eggs.

"Nothing," I said.

"What do you mean 'nothing'? What have you opened the incubator for? Didn't I tell you we have to wait twenty-one days. I suppose you think you can hatch chickens in one day."

"I don't think anything of the kind," I said. I tried to explain to him about having to turn the eggs round every three hours, but he wouldn't listen and kept shouting at the top of his voice:

"Put the lid on! Put it on, I tell you! A fellow can't fall asleep for a minute. As soon as I shut my eyes you had to go and open the incubator."

"I wasn't looking at them at all," I said.

He ran over and put the lid on, but by that time I had turned them all over.

Mishka had kicked up such a row that his Pa and Ma came running in.

"What's all the noise about?" they asked.

"This donkey went and opened up the incubator," said Mishka.

I explained that the eggs had to be turned over, otherwise the chicks would come out lop-sided.

"Who said so?" said Mishka. "Why don't hens hatch lop-sided chicks?"

"Hens always turn the eggs over when they're hatching chicks," said Mishka's mother.

"How does a stupid hen know that eggs have to be turned over?" said Mishka.

"They're not so stupid as you think," replied his mother. Mishka thought for a moment.

"Now I come to think of it, I've seen them turning over their eggs myself," he said at last. "I always wondered why they kept pushing at them with their noses."

Mishka's papa laughed. "Silly boy," he said. "When did you see a hen with a nose?"

"Beak, I mean. But it's the hen's nose just the same."

THE TEMPERATURE RISES

Around ten o'clock the mercury in the thermometer went up one degree for some reason, so we had to pull out one of the exercise books and lower the lamp.

"I can't make it out," said Mishka, puzzled. "All night long the temperature kept dropping and now it's going up again. Queer."

We had to lower the lamp once more before dinner because the temperature went up again. After dinner, Mishka stretched out on the sofa and fell asleep again. I felt lonely sitting there by myself, so I brought my album and sketched Mishka as he slept. It's always easier to draw people when they're asleep because that's the only time they keep still.

After a while Kostya Devyatkin came in. When he saw Mishka asleep he said: "What's wrong with him, sleeping sickness?"

"No," I said. "He's just having a nap."

Kostya went over and shook Mishka by the shoulder.

"Hey, it's time to get up!"

Mishka sprang up. "Eh, what? Is it morning already?"

"Morning!" laughed Kostya. "It'll soon be evening. Get up and come out to play. Look, the sun's shining and the birds are singing."

"We've no time for playing. We have work to do!" said Mishka.

"What work?"

"Very important work."

Mishka went over to the incubator, looked at the thermometer and let out a yell:

"What are you doing! Sitting there like a goat in the market-place? Look what's happened!"

I looked at the thermometer. It showed 103 degrees again.

Mishka quickly lowered the lamp.

"If I hadn't waked up you'd have let it go up to 104 degrees, I bet!" he raged.

"It's not my fault if you snooze all the time," I said.

"Is it my fault I didn't sleep all night?"

"It isn't my fault either," I said.

Kostya noticed the incubator. "What's that? Another steam-engine?" he asked.

"Don't be silly, does it look like a steam-engine?"

"Well, what is it, then?"

"Guess!"

"Hm!" said Kostya, scratching his head. "Must be a steam-turbine."

"Wrong. Try again."

"All right, then. Some sort of jet engine."

Mishka and I burst out laughing. "You can guess for a hundred years and you'd never guess!"

"Well, what is it?"

"An incubator."

"Ah, an incubator. I see. What's it for?"

"Don't you know what an incubator's for?" said Mishka. "It hatches chickens."

"What does it hatch them out of?"

Mishka snorted with disgust. "Out of eggs, of course, you chump."

"Oh, eggs! Of course. It's instead of a hen. I know all about it, only I thought it was called a hencoopater. And where are the eggs?"

"Here, inside the box."

"Let's see them."

"Nothing doing. If we show everybody we'll never have any chicks. If you like, you can wait until we turn them over and then you'll see."

"And when will that be?"

Mishka and I did some quick figuring and it turned out that the eggs would have to be turned over at eight o'clock.

Kostya said he would wait, so Mishka brought in his chess-board and we sat down to play. To tell the truth, it's not much fun for three to play chess, because only two can play really and the third sits by and gives advice. And nothing good ever comes of that. If you win they say it was because you were helped, and if you lose they laugh at you and say that you can't even play when somebody prompts you. Chess is a game that should be played by only two people at a time and with no one interfering.

At last the clock struck eight. Mishka opened the incubator and started turning the eggs round while Kostya stood by and counted.

"Ten, eleven," he counted. "Eleven eggs. So you'll have eleven chicks?"

"Eleven?" echoed Mishka in surprise. "You've made a mistake. There were twelve. Dash it all, someone's gone and stolen one. It's a rotten shame! You can't take a nap around here without eggs being stolen. What were you doing?" he pounced on me. "You were supposed to be watching!"

"So I was. I was here all the time. Let's count them again. Kostya must have made a mistake."

Mishka counted the eggs over again and got thirteen.

"Look at that," he growled. "Now there's an extra one. Who could have put it there?"

Then I counted them and there were exactly twelve.

"Some counters!" I said. "Can't even count up to twelve."

"Oh dear," wailed Mishka. "Now I'm all mixed up. I had one egg left to turn over and now I don't remember which one it was."

While he was trying to remember, Maya came running in. She went straight up to the incubator, pointed to the biggest egg and said:

"That's my chick in there."

Mishka and I got angry and pushed her away. "If you come in here bothering us again you won't get any chick at all," we told her. Maya began to cry.

"You took my bowls. I can look as much as I like."

"Oh, can you? We'll see about that," said Mishka, closing the door firmly behind her.

"What shall we do now?" I said. "Shall we have to turn all the eggs round again?"

"No, we'd better not, or else we may turn them back on the side they were lying on. Better let one of them stay as it was. Next time we'll be more careful."

"You ought to mark the eggs so you'll know which you've turned and which you haven't," Kostya proposed.

"How?" asked Mishka.

"You can put a cross on them."

"No, I'll number them." Mishka got a pencil and wrote a number on all the eggs from one to twelve.

"The next time we turn them over all the numbers will be underneath, and after that the numbers will be on top again. No chance of making any more mistakes," said Mishka, and closed the incubator.

As Kostya was leaving, Mishka said to him:

"Don't tell anybody at school about our incubator."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . . They'll laugh at us."

"Why should they laugh? An incubator is a very useful thing."

"Well, you know what the boys are like, they'll say we're like a couple of sitting-hens. And then, suppose it's a failure. We'll never hear the end of it."

"But why should it be a failure?"

"Anything can happen. It's not as easy as you think. For all we know, we may be doing it the wrong way. So you keep quiet about it."

"All right," said Kostya. "I'll keep mum."

MAYA ON DUTY

"Well, how's everything?" I asked Mishka when I met him the next morning.

"Fine, only the temperature kept dropping again all night long."

"You mean to say you didn't go to bed last night either?"

"No, I'm smarter now, I put the alarm clock under my pillow and it woke me up every three hours."

"But why did the temperature drop? It stayed up during the day," I said.

"I know why," said Mishka. "It's cooler at night and so the incubator cools down faster. But in the daytime it gets warmer, that's why the temperature goes up by day and down at night."

"How are we going to manage?" I asked him. "Who's going to look after the temperature while we're at school?"

"Perhaps Maya will. Let's ask her."

Mishka called Maya in and asked her if she would agree to look after the incubator while we were at school.



"No, I won't," said Maya. "Yesterday you pushed me out of the room and now you want me to help you."

"Look here," I said. "You don't want the chicks to die, do you? Because if we don't take care of them they will, and so will your chick too. We're not asking for ourselves, it's for the chicks' sake."

She couldn't refuse when I put it to her like that. I showed her what had to be done.

"See this thermometer," I said. "The mercury has to stand exactly at 102 degrees. Will you remember?"

"I'll remember."

Just to make sure I took a red pencil and marked where the mercury should stand.

"Now see you don't get anything mixed up," I said. "As soon as the mercury goes the least little bit higher you pull one of the exercise books from under the lamp. When the lamp is lowered the mercury in the thermometer comes down too. Understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

After that I showed her how to turn the eggs and told her that as soon as the clock struck eleven she must open the incubator and turn the eggs.

Maya caught on. I made her repeat the instructions to make sure that she got everything straight. Then Mishka and I went off to school.

"Well, how's your incubator getting along?" asked Kostya as soon as we entered the class-room.

"Shh," Mishka hissed, glancing over his shoulder to see if anyone had heard.

"I was whispering."

"'Whispering'! growled Misha. "You were yelling at the top of your voice."

"All right, mum's the word. But I say, do let me tell the others."

"If you do, you'd better not come and see us any more. You promised to keep it a secret and now you go. . . ."

"All right, I'll keep quiet. Listen, I've got a wonderful idea. At Natural History lesson, I'll tell Marya Petrovna about your incubator. She'll be ever so pleased."

"You dare! If you tell Marya Petrovna the whole class will hear."

"All right, I'll shut up. I'll be as silent as the grave."

Kostya covered his mouth with his hand and walked away. But you could see that he was just itching to tell someone about our incubator.

Lessons began. Mishka could hardly keep still for worrying about the incubator.

"What if Maya does something wrong?"

"But what can she do?"

"She might forget to watch the temperature."

"But I gave her strict instructions."

"Suppose she gets tired of staying home and goes out to play?"

"She promised she wouldn't."

"What if she goes and takes the bowls out of the incubator?"

"She won't do that."

"The bulb might burn out. What'll we do then?"

At Natural History lesson Mishka and I talked so much that Marya Petrovna separated us. Mishka sat looking like a thunder-cloud, glaring at me from the other end of the room. And to make matters worse, Kostya cupped his hand to his mouth and called out in a loud whisper:

"Hey! I'm going to tell Marya Petrovna about your incubator."

Mishka writhed on his seat and hissed back: "Traitor, sneak!"

But Kostya had already shot up his hand.

"Yes, Kostya?" asked Marya Petrovna.

Mishka shook his fist at Kostya.

"Marya Petrovna, what is an incubator?" Kostya asked innocently.

Marya Petrovna began to explain what an incubator was. She said that long, long ago people learned how to hatch chickens without brood-hens by heating the eggs to a certain temperature. Even in ancient Egypt and China, two thousand years ago, they had incubators. Archaeologists have found incubators made by the ancient Egyptians. Of course they weren't big ones and they didn't hatch very many chickens at a time. Today there are incubators which take several thousand eggs at a time.

"Two chaps I know made an incubator themselves," said Kostya. "Do you think they'll hatch any chicks?"

"You *can* hatch chickens in a home-made incubator," answered Marya Petrovna, "but it is a great deal of trouble. Factory incubators have all sorts of devices for regulating the temperature and moisture, but home-made incubators require careful watching. If your friends are persevering and serious they will succeed. But if they are anything like our Misha and Kolya I'm afraid nothing will come of it."

"Why?" Mishka blurted out.

"Because you are very badly behaved and inattentive even in class," said Marya Petrovna and went on with the lesson.

Just as we were leaving school that day, Vitya Smirnov grabbed hold of us and said it was our turn that day to work in the Young Naturalists' circle.

"Oh no, we can't possibly," said Mishka all excited. "We haven't any time."

"You never have any time for anything. Why did you join the circle if you never come? This is spring, the busiest season. We have to make bird-houses."

"We'll make bird-houses later on."

"But the birds will be arriving soon."

"No, they won't."

“What do you mean? You think the birds are going to wait for you?”

“They’ll wait, just a little,” said Mishka.

We ran home. To our relief everything was in order. The bulb had not burned out and the temperature was just right. Maya was sitting at her post beside the incubator. We thanked her and sent her off to play.

A CALAMITY!

From that time on life became a daily routine of watching the thermometer and turning the eggs over every three hours and refilling the water tank and the wooden bowls, because the water evaporated quickly. It wasn’t what you would call hard work but you had to be on the look-out all the time, otherwise something was bound to happen—either the temperature would suddenly go up or you’d forget to turn the eggs. You had to keep your mind on the incubator all the time.

Mishka had the worst of it because he had to watch at night. He didn’t get a decent night’s sleep and for days he went about as groggy as a fly in autumn. He often took a nap after dinner on the couch in the kitchen and I would take out my drawing-book and sketch him while he slept.

That went on for five days and five nights. On the sixth day Mishka fell asleep in school, right in the middle of a lesson. Of course Nadezhda Victorovna scolded him and the whole class made fun of him.

Mishka felt very bad about it. Everybody likes to laugh at other people but nobody likes to be laughed at himself.

The worst of it was that I had brought my drawings to school that day to show the boys. They guessed at once it was Mishka I had sketched sleeping in different poses—lying, sitting and half standing.

"You certainly are a champion sleeper," said Lyosha Kurochkin to Mishka.

"He's beat the world record!" added Senya Bobrov. "Sleeps like a dormouse, twenty-four hours a day!"

The drawings were passed from hand to hand. Everybody made funny remarks and roared with laughter.

"What did you go and bring those stupid drawings of yours here for," Mishka pounced on me.

"How did I know they would think it so funny?" I said.

"You did it on purpose so the whole class should have a good laugh at my expense. A fine friend you are! I shan't have anything more to do with you."

"Mishka, I swear I didn't do it on purpose, honestly I didn't. If I had known this would happen I would never have sketched you at all," I protested.

But Mishka wouldn't talk to me all that day. In the evening he said:

"You ought to take the incubator over to your place and do some night watching yourself instead of drawing silly cartoons of me."

"I don't mind," I said. "You've watched for five nights. Now it's my turn."

We carried the incubator over to my place. And now my troubles began.

Every night I put the alarm clock under my pillow and in the middle of the night it went off right in my ear. I'd get up and stagger to the kitchen, check the temperature, turn the eggs over and stagger back to bed again. Most times I couldn't fall asleep at first, but the minute I dozed off the alarm would start buzzing again until I was ready to smash it to pieces for not letting me sleep.

Every morning I got up feeling so groggy I could hardly get out of bed. Half asleep, I'd pull on my clothes, and before I knew it I'd

find myself trying to pull my trousers on over my head or sticking my legs through my shirt sleeves. Once I even put my boots on the wrong feet. The boys noticed it and made fun of me, and I had to change during the lesson.

But the worst calamity happened on the tenth night. I don't know whether it was because I had forgotten to wind the clock or because I didn't hear it go off. Anyhow, I went to bed and didn't wake up until morning. When I opened my eyes it was broad daylight. At first I couldn't understand what had happened, and then I remembered I hadn't got up once during the night. I jumped out of bed and rushed to the incubator. The thermometer showed 99 degrees. Three whole degrees less than it should be! I quickly stuffed two exercise books under the lamp. But in my heart I knew it was no use. The eggs must be quite cold by now. Ten days' hard work wasted! The embryos must be quite big by now and now I'd gone and ruined everything!

I was so angry with myself I punched my own head.

The mercury gradually rose until it reached 102 degrees. As I watched it, I thought sadly to myself:

"There, the temperature's normal. The eggs look exactly the same as before but inside they're all dead and there won't be any chicks."

But perhaps nothing had happened after all, perhaps the embryos hadn't had time to die. How could we find out? The only way was to go on heating the eggs and if on the twenty-first day the chicks didn't hatch out that would mean they had died. Maybe they weren't dead. But it would be eleven whole days before I knew!

"That's the end of our happy family!" I thought sorrowfully. "Instead of twelve little chicks there won't be a single one."

Just then Mishka came in. He looked at the thermometer and said brightly:

"Splendid! Just the right temperature. Everything's going fine. Now it's my turn to take night duty."

"No," I said. "I'd better carry on myself. Why should you suffer for nothing?"

"Why for nothing?"

"Suppose the chicks don't hatch out?"

"Well, even if they don't, there's no reason why you should do all the hard work. We're friends. So we each have to do our share."

I didn't know what to say. I hadn't the courage to confess, so I decided to say nothing at all. I know it was not nice of me, but I couldn't help it.

PIONEER RALLY

Kostya came in to see us every day, and then reported to the fellows how the hatching was coming along. Of course he didn't tell them that it was Mishka and me who had made the incubator. He pretended it was some boys from another school.

"I'd like to meet those boys," Vitya Smirnov said one day.

"What for?"

"They sound interesting. We could do with a few like that in our Young Naturalists' circle. We'd have things going fine. But with chaps like Misha and Kolya you can't get anything done. They don't want to do any work at all. They didn't help to plant trees, and now they aren't making bird-houses. . . ."

"Those boys didn't plant trees either," said Kostya with a wink at Mishka and me.

"Well, that's different. They've got enough to do without that."

Vitya never suspected that me and Mishka were the boys Kostya had told him about. And we certainly had plenty of worry. Because

of the incubator we had neglected our lessons, and we both got 2 out of 5 in arithmetic.

Alexander Yefremovich gave me a problem to solve on the blackboard. I couldn't do it, so he gave me a 2. Then he called Mishka and gave him a 2 plus. Of course we deserved it because we hadn't learned the lesson, but it was very unpleasant to get low marks just the same.

"It isn't so bad for you," said Mishka. "You only have a 2, but I've got 2 plus."

"Silly, 2 plus is higher than 2," I said.

"Rubbish! A plus after 2 doesn't make it 3, does it?"

"No, it will be 2 just the same."

"Then what is the plus for?"

"Dashed if I know."

"I'll tell you. The plus is so you shouldn't feel so bad about the 2. It's like saying: there's a nice little plus for you. But the 2 remains a 2. That's what hurts."

"Why does it hurt?"

"Because it shows you're a dunce. If you weren't, a plain 2 would be enough to show you that you don't know anything. But a dunce has to have a 2 plus so that he shouldn't think he's being treated unfairly. But I don't like being considered a dunce. You can get a 2 minus also," he went on. "I don't see the sense of that at all. A 2 means that you don't know anything. But how can you know less than nothing?"

"You can't," I said.

"That's what I say!" said Mishka. "A 2 minus means you not only don't know anything but you don't want to know. If you just haven't done your lessons you get a 2, but if you are a well-known loafer they give you a 2 minus to make you feel it. You can even get a 1, you know," he went on, getting into his stride.

But he didn't have a chance to say any more about that because Alexander Yefremovich separated us.

At the last break Zhenya Skvortsov said: "Stay in class after lessons. We're going to have a rally."

"Oh, but we can't stay, we've no time," said Mishka and I.

"You've got to stay," said Zhenya, "because we're going to talk about you two."

"What have we done?"

"You'll find out at the meeting," was all Zhenya said.

"I like that!" said Mishka. "We only just got that 2 and they're already calling a meeting about it. He thinks because he's the group chairman he can call meetings about everybody. Wait till he gets a 2 himself, I'd like to see him calling a meeting about that."

"He won't get 2, he's good at lessons," I said.

"What are you sticking up for him for?"

"I'm not sticking up for him."

"Dash it, now we'll have to stay behind," Mishka fussed.

"That's all right," I said. "Maya is looking after the incubator."

We stayed for the meeting.

"Today we are going to talk about marks and conduct," began Zhenya Skvortsov. "Lately some boys have been misbehaving in class, fidgeting and chattering and interfering with the others. Misha and Kolya are the worst offenders. They have had to be separated several times for talking. That won't do. It's no good at all. And now to cap it all they both got a 2 today."

"We didn't both get anything of the kind. I got a 2 plus," said Mishka.

"It makes no difference," said Zhenya. "You've both been getting low marks in other subjects too."

"We haven't any other 2's, and I only have a 3 for Russian," said Mishka.

"He has a 3 minus," put in Vanya Lozhkin.

"You keep your nose out of this," said Mishka.

"What do you mean? This is a Pioneer meeting. I have a right to say what I like."

"You have to ask for the floor first."

"All right, I want the floor. Boys, if you ask me, they are getting bad marks because for some reason they haven't been doing any home-work lately. Let them tell us what that reason is."

"That's right, tell us. We've a right to know," said Zhenya.

"There isn't any reason," replied Mishka.

"I know what it is," said Lyosha Kurochkin. "They talk all the time in class and don't listen to the teacher, and they don't study at home either. I think they ought to be separated once and for all, so they won't jabber."

"You can't separate us," said Mishka. "We're friends. You can't go and separate friends, can you?"

"If being friends only does you harm, it's the best thing to do," said Senya Bobrov.

At that point Kostya stood up for us. "Whoever heard of friendship doing anyone any harm," he said.

"Theirs does, because they copy each other in everything. If one of them talks, the other talks too, if one of them doesn't want to do his lessons, the other one doesn't either. If one gets a 2, so does the other. No, they've got to be separated and that's all," said Vitya Smirnov.

"Just a minute," said Kostya. "We can always separate them. But let's first see if we can't help them. Suppose they haven't any time to do their lessons?"

"What do you mean, haven't any time?"

"Well, suppose they're busy doing something very important."

Senya Bobrov laughed. "Something very important? What could that be?"

"Suppose they are making an incubator?"

"An incubator?" Senya laughed again.

"Yes, an incubator. Think it's easy? For all you know they don't sleep nights watching over the temperature. For all you know they work at it all day long and here we are scolding them. For all you know. . ."

"What's all this mystery about I'd like to know," Zhenya said, getting angry. "Have they really made an incubator?"

"Yes," said Kostya.

"They went and copied those boys you told us about," said Vitya.

"No," said Kostya. "They didn't copy anybody. They're the boys I told you about."

"What?!"

"That's right."

"But—but you said they were from another school?"

"I just said that for fun."

Everyone crowded round Mishka and me.

"So you made an incubator all by yourselves?"

And Vitya Smirnov said: "It's a shame! Real naturalists don't do things like that. Fancy making an incubator and keeping quiet about it! Don't you think we'd all be interested in a thing like that? Why should you keep it a secret?"

"We thought you'd just laugh at us," we said.

"Why should we laugh? What's funny about it? On the contrary, we could have helped you. We could take turns watching the temperature. It would be easier for you and you'd have time to do your lessons."

"Boys," said Vadik Zaitsev. "Let's take patronage over that incubator."

"That's right!" they all shouted.

Vitya said he would come and see us after dinner and we'd work out a schedule and arrange for everyone to take turns.

At that the meeting closed.

PATRONS AT WORK

After dinner nearly the whole Young Naturalists' circle gathered in our kitchen. We showed them our incubator and told them how the heating apparatus worked, how we checked the temperature and turned the eggs over at regular intervals. Then we sat down to work out the schedule. But first, at Vitya Smirnov's suggestion, we drew up a list of rules for those on duty.

Every day after school two boys were to come to us and Mishka and I would tell them what to do and leave them in charge of the incubator for the rest of the day. They themselves would take time off by turns to go home for dinner and do their lessons. It was part of their job to see that Mishka and I didn't hang around the incubator instead of doing our lessons.

After that, Vitya drew up the schedule so each one would know what day he would be on duty. We hung it up on the wall.

"Why aren't our names on it?" Mishka asked. "Are we going to be left out?"

"What about the night-time?" replied Vitya. "You will have to take turns doing night duty."

After that Zhenya sent all the boys away.

"Everyone can go except the two on duty today," he said. "There's no use having everyone hanging around."

The others went away, leaving Zhenya, Vitya, Mishka and me.

"You go along too," said Zhenya when we were alone.

"Where shall we go?"

"Go and do your lessons."

"But suppose something goes wrong here."

"Nothing will go wrong. If anything happens I'll call you."

"All right. But be sure you do."

So Mishka and I had to sit down and do our lessons. We did our grammar, and geography, and one sum. There were two, but the other one was too hard, so we laid it aside and went to see what was going on in the kitchen.

"What are you doing here?" said Zhenya when we came in. "Weren't you told to do your lessons?"

"We've done them already."

"Have you? Let's have a look at your exercise books."

"Hey, what's this?" said Mishka. "A check-up?"

"We've taken patronage over you, so we're responsible for you, see?"

We brought in our exercise books.

"But you've only done one sum. There are two."

"We'll do the other one later on."

"Oh no, you'll do it right now. If you start putting it off you'll forget, and then you'll turn up at school tomorrow with nothing done."

"We've done one sum, haven't we?"

"One isn't enough," said Zhenya firmly. "You know the proverb: 'Work's done, now for some fun.'"

So we had to go back and puzzle over that problem. We worked and worked but it wouldn't come out. We spent a whole hour over it, and then we went back to the kitchen.

"It doesn't come out," said Mishka. "We did everything right, but the answer we get isn't the same as the one at the back of the book. Must be a misprint."

"That's right, go and blame the book!" said Zhenya.

"It's happened before that the answer in the book wasn't right."

"Nonsense!" said Zhenya. "Let's have a look at it."

He went with us to our room and looked over what we had done. He puzzled and puzzled over the problem, everything seemed to be right, but the answer didn't come out.

"What did I tell you!" said Mishka gleefully.

But Zhenya said there must be some mistake and he wouldn't give up until he'd found it. He checked the sum from the beginning again and at last he found the mistake.

"Here it is," he said. "What's seven times seven, eh?"

"Forty-nine, of course."

"Yes, but look what you've got? Twenty-one!"

He corrected the mistake and everything came out right.

"It's all because you're careless," he said and went back to the incubator.

We copied out the problem into our exercise books and went back to the kitchen.

"We've finished," we said.

"Good, now you had better go out for a walk. A little fresh air will do you good."

There was no use protesting, so Mishka and I went off. It was a fine sunny day. The boys in the yard were playing volleyball and we joined them. After that, we went in to Kostya Devyatkin's, and while we were there, Vadik Zaitsev dropped in and the four of us played lotto and all sorts of other games until evening. It was quite late when we got home. We went straight to the kitchen and found Vanya

Lozhkin there besides Zhenya and Vitya. He said he had persuaded his mother to allow him to look after the incubator that night.

"Hey, what's this!" said Mishka. "Me and Kolya won't ever get a chance to do anything this way! Vanya takes night duty tonight, and someone else will get permission tomorrow. No, I can't agree to that."

"All right," said Vitya. "I'll put you down on the time-table and you'll take turns like everybody else."

So he put us down last on the list.

Mishka and I began figuring out when our turn would come round, and it came out on the best day of all, the twenty-first day, the day the chickens were supposed to hatch out!

FINAL PREPARATIONS

Now at last Mishka and I could relax. To tell the truth, we weren't sorry, because the incubator had become a bit of a burden to us. We had been tied to it day and night and we were so afraid of forgetting something that we thought of it all the time. Now everything was going along splendidly without us.

We began to do our share of work in the Young Naturalists' circle. We made two bird-houses and hung them up in our garden, and planted flowers and trees in our school garden. But the most important thing was that now we had plenty of time to do our lessons. And when my mother and Mishka's saw that we were getting better marks they were glad the boys were helping us look after the incubator.

When the Young Naturalists' circle met, Marya Petrovna told us how to prepare for the arrival of the chicks. She advised us to plant some grass so they should have fresh greens to eat. She said that the best thing to plant was oats because they are very nourishing and grow fast.

Now where were we to get the oats to plant?

"We'll have to go to the bird market," said Vanya Lozhkin. "They sell all sorts of bird food there."

After school Vanya and Zhenya went off to the bird market. Two hours later they came back with their pockets full of oats and quite a tale to tell.

"There weren't any oats at the bird market. We went all over the place and saw all sorts of things—hemp, millet, burdock seed, everything except oats. We thought we'd have to come without any but we decided to go and have a look at the rabbits before leaving. While we were looking at the rabbits we saw a horse eating oats out of a nose-bag. So we asked for some."

"Whom did you ask, the horse?" Mishka said surprised.

"Don't be silly! We asked his owner, of course, the collective farmer who had brought the rabbits to the market. He was a nice man.



He asked us what we wanted oats for and when we told him we wanted them for chicks he said: 'Oh, but you don't feed oats to chicks.' But we told him we wanted to plant some for the sprouts and he said we could take as much as we wanted. So we filled up our pockets."

We got busy at once and made two shallow boxes. We filled them with earth, poured on water and mixed it up into a thin mud. Then we threw the oats into the earth, mixed it up again well and put the boxes under the stove so the seed would be warm.

Marya Petrovna had told us that the seeds of plants, like birds' eggs, are living things. Life slumbers inside the seed until it gets into the warm moist earth which wakes it up and it begins to grow. Like all living things, seeds can die and dead seeds won't grow.

We were very much afraid that our seeds might be "dead" ones and kept looking into the boxes to see if they had come up. Two days passed and there was no sign. On the third day we noticed that the soil in the boxes had cracked here and there and seemed a little swollen in spots.

"What's this?" asked Mishka indignantly. "Someone's been tampering with the boxes!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Lyosha Kurochkin who was on duty that day with Senya Bobrov.

"Then why is the earth all broken up like that?" shouted Mishka. "You must have been poking it with your fingers to have a look at the seeds."

"We didn't poke anything!" Senya protested.

I lifted a lump of soil and felt for the grain underneath. It had swelled up and split open and there was a little white shoot on top. Mishka also pulled out a seed and examined it for a long time.

"I know what happened!" he cried. "They poked the soil up themselves!"

“Who did?”

“The seeds. They woke up and now they’re pushing their way through the soil. Look at the way the soil has swelled! They’ve no more room down there under the soil.” Mishka ran off to call the boys to show them how the seeds were growing. Lyosha and Senya and I pulled another few seeds out of the soil. They had all begun to sprout. Soon the boys arrived and crowded round. Everyone wanted to have a look at the seeds.

“Look,” said Vitya Smirnov, “the seeds are bursting open and the oats are hatching out of them just like chicks.”

“Of course,” said Mishka. “Oats are also living things, only they grow up and stand in one place, but when our chicks hatch out they’ll run around and squeak and ask for food. You’ll see what a jolly little family we’ll have!”

THE HARDEST DAY OF ALL

Working all together was fun and the time passed quickly. At last the twenty-first day arrived. It was a Friday. We had everything ready for the brood. We found a large pot in the shed and lined it with felt to make a warming-pan for the new-born chicks. Now it stood ready on top of a pan of hot water, waiting for the first chick to hatch.

Mishka and I had wanted to stay up the night before, but Vadik Zaitsev had got his mother to allow him to take night duty, and he wouldn’t hear of us being there.

“I don’t need you hanging around when I’m on duty,” he said. “You can go to bed.”

“But what if the chickens begin hatching during the night?” we said.

“What about it? As soon as a chick comes out I’ll drop it into the pot and let it dry off.”

"Don't you dare drop it!" I said, horrified. "You must be very gentle with chicks."

"Don't worry, I'll be gentle. Now you toddle off to bed like good boys. You're on duty tomorrow, don't forget. So you'd better have a good night's rest."

"All right," agreed Mishka. "Only please be sure and see you wake us if the chicks begin hatching. We've waited so long for this."

Vadik promised.

We went off to bed, but I couldn't sleep for a long time for worrying about the chickens. Next morning I woke up very early and ran to Mishka's right away. He was up already too, and was sitting beside the incubator examining the eggs.

"I don't see any sign yet."

"Too early yet, most likely," said Vadik.

Vadik soon went home because the night was over and our watch was on. When he had gone, Mishka decided to examine all the eggs once more. We began turning them over and looking for some tiny little hole which the chick inside would make with its beak. But there wasn't so much as a crack in any of the shells. We closed the incubator and sat quiet for a long time without speaking.

"Suppose we break open one and see if there's a chick inside or not?" I suggested.

"No, you mustn't. Not yet," said Mishka. "The chick is still breathing through its skin and not its lungs. As soon as it begins breathing with its lungs it will crack open the shell by itself. If we crack it too soon the chick will die."

"But they must be alive inside there," I said. "Perhaps you can hear them move if you listen carefully?"

Mishka took an egg out of the incubator and put it to his ear. I bent over him and put my ear to it too.

“Be quiet!” growled Mishka. “How can I hear anything with you snoring into my ear!”

I held my breath. It was very quiet, so quiet you could hear the watch ticking on the table. Suddenly the bell rang. Mishka jumped and nearly dropped the egg. I ran to open the door. It was Vitya. He wanted to know whether the chicks had begun to hatch out yet.



“No,” said Mishka. “It’s too early.”

“All right, I’ll drop in again before school,” said Vitya.

He went away and Mishka took the egg out again and put it to his ear. He sat like that for a long time with his eyes closed, listening intently.

“I can’t hear a sound,” he said at last.

I took the egg and listened too. But I could not hear anything either.

“Perhaps the embryo is dead?” I said. “We ought to try the others.”

We took the eggs out one after the other and listened to them all, but not one of them gave any sign of life.

“They couldn’t all be dead, could they?” said Mishka. “One of them at least must be alive.”

The bell rang again. This time it was Senya Bobrov.

“What are you doing up so early?” I asked him.

“I came to find out how the chicks are coming along.”

“They aren’t coming along at all,” Mishka answered. “It isn’t time yet.”

Seryozha arrived next.

“Well, any chicks yet?”

"You are too impatient," said Mishka. "You expect the chicks to start hatching from early morning. There's plenty of time."

Seryozha and Senya sat for a while and then left. Mishka and I began listening to the eggs again.

"No, it's no use," he said miserably. "I don't hear a thing."

"Perhaps they're keeping still just to fool us?" I suggested.

"They ought to be cracking the shell by now."

Then Yura Filippov and Stasik Levshin came, and after them, Vanya Lozhkin. They kept coming, one after the other, and by the time we were due to leave for school, it began to look like a general meeting. We called Maya and told her what to do if the chicks began hatching without us, and left with the others for school.

I don't know how we lived through that day. It was the hardest day in our lives. It seemed to us that someone was deliberately stretching out the time and making every lesson ten times longer than usual. We were all terribly afraid that the chickens would begin to hatch out while we were in school and that Maya would not manage by herself. The last lesson was the worst. We thought it would never end. It was so long that we began to wonder whether we hadn't missed the bell. Then we thought that perhaps the bell was out of order. Or that Aunt Dunya, the janitress, had forgotten to ring the last bell and had gone home and we'd have to sit in school until tomorrow morning. The whole class was fidgety and nervous. Everybody sent little notes to Zhenya Skvortsov asking what time it was, but as luck would have it Zhenya had left his watch at home that day. It was so noisy in class that Alexander Yefremovich had to stop several times to ask for silence. But the noise continued. Finally Mishka raised his hand to say that the lesson must be over, but just at that moment the bell went and everyone sprang up and rushed to the door. Alexander Yefre-

movich made us all sit down again and said no one must leave his desk until the teacher had left the room. Then he turned to Mishka:

"You wanted to ask me something?"

"No, I just wanted to say that the lesson was over."

"But you raised your hand before the bell rang?"

"I thought the bell was out of order."

Alexander Yefremovich shook his head, picked up the register and went out of the room. The boys dashed into the corridor and down the stairs. There was a jam at the exit, but me and Mishka managed to push our way through. We rushed headlong down the street, with the others tearing after us.

Five minutes later we were home. Maya was sitting at her post by the incubator sewing a new dress for her doll Zinaida.

"Anything happened?" we asked.

"Nothing."

"How long is it since you looked into the incubator?"



"Quite a long time ago. When I turned over the eggs."

Mishka went over to the incubator. All the boys crowded around, craning their necks and standing on tiptoe. Vanya Lozhkin climbed on to a chair to see better, fell off and nearly knocked Lyosha Kurochkin down. But Mishka couldn't bring himself to open the lid. He was afraid to look.

"Come on, open it up! What are you waiting for?" someone said.

At last Mishka lifted up the lid. The eggs lay at the bottom as before, looking like big white pebbles.

Mishka stood for a while without saying anything, then he turned them over carefully one by one and examined them from all sides.

"Not a single crack!" he announced mournfully.

WHO IS TO BLAME?

The boys stood around in silence.

"Maybe they won't hatch out at all," said Senya Bobrov. "What do you think, eh?"

Mishka shrugged his shoulders: "How can I tell? I'm not a sitting-hen! What do I know about hatching?"

Everyone began talking at once. Some said the chicks wouldn't hatch out at all, some said they still might, others said they either would or they wouldn't. At last Vitya Smirnov stopped all the argument.

"It's too soon to tell for sure," he said. "The day isn't over yet. We have to carry on as before. And now everybody clear out except those on duty."

The boys went home. Mishka and I were left alone. We took another look at the eggs to see if there wasn't at least one tiny crack somewhere, but there was nothing. Mishka closed the lid.

"All right, I don't care what happens! It's too soon to get upset anyway. We'll wait until evening and if nothing happens by then we can begin to worry."

We decided not to worry and settled down to wait patiently. But that was easier said than done. We couldn't stop worrying however hard we tried and every ten minutes we peeped inside the incubator. The other boys were worried too and kept coming in to inquire. Everyone had the same question: "Well, how is it?"

After a while Mishka stopped answering and only shrugged his shoulders, but he had to shrug them so often that by the end of the day his shoulders were hunched right up to his ears.

As the evening wore on the boys stopped coming. Vitya was the last to drop in. He sat with us for a long time.

"Perhaps you miscalculated?" he said.

We began counting again but there was no mistake. This was the twenty-first day and it was coming to an end and there were no chicks.

"Never mind," Vitya said to console us. "We'll wait till the morning. They may hatch out during the night."

I persuaded my mother to let me stay over at Mishka's place and we decided to sit up all night and watch. We sat for a long time by the incubator in silence. We had nothing to talk about any more. We couldn't even day-dream because all our hopes were dashed. Soon the trams stopped running and it grew very quiet. The street lamp outside the window went out. I lay down on the sofa. Mishka dozed sitting up, but he nearly fell off the chair, so he came over and lay beside me on the sofa, and we fell asleep.

When we woke up it was daylight and everything was as before. The eggs still lay in the incubator, not so much as a crack in any of them, and not a sound inside.

All the boys were terribly disappointed.

"What could have happened?" they asked. "We followed all the instructions carefully, didn't we?"

"I don't know," said Mishka, shrugging his shoulders.

Only I knew what had happened. Of course the embryos had died that time I overslept. The temperature had gone down and they had perished from the cold—died before their lives had properly begun. I felt very guilty before the others. All their trouble would be for nothing and all because of me! But I couldn't tell them just then, I decided to own up later on when the whole incident would be forgotten and they wouldn't feel so bad about losing the chicks.

We were all very sad that day in school. All the boys looked at us with such sympathy as if we were in mourning for somebody, and when Senya Bobrov took it into his head to call us the "chickabiddies," just out of habit, the others jumped on him and said he ought to be ashamed of himself. Mishka and I felt quite uncomfortable.

"I'd rather they scolded us!" said Mishka.

"Why should they?"

"Well, look at all the work they did for us. They have every right to be sore."

After school, some of the boys dropped in, but soon they stopped coming. All except Kostya Devyatkin, who came once or twice. He was the only one who hadn't given up hope yet.

"See," Mishka said to me. "Now all the boys are angry with us. Why should they be, I'd like to know? Anyone can make a mistake."

"But you said yourself they have a right to be sore."

"So they have," replied Mishka irritably. "And so have you. It's all my fault, I know."

"Why is it your fault? Nobody is blaming you for anything. And it isn't your fault at all," I said.

"Yes, it is. But you won't be too angry with me, will you?"

“Why should I be?”

“Oh, because I’m such a good-for-nothing. It’s all my bad luck, nothing I do ever comes to any good.”

“That’s not true. It’s me who spoils everything,” I said. “It’s all my fault.”

“No, it isn’t. It’s my fault. It’s me who killed the chicks.”

“How could you have killed them?”

“I’ll tell you, only promise you won’t be angry?” said Mishka. “Once I fell asleep early in the morning, and when I woke up and looked at the thermometer it had gone up to 104 degrees. I opened the lid quickly to let the eggs cool off, but I suppose it was too late.”

“When was that?”

“Five days ago.”

Mishka looked terribly guilty and miserable.

“Well, you needn’t worry,” I said to him. “The eggs were spoiled long before that.”

“Before what?”

“Before you overslept.”

“Who spoiled them?”

“I did.”

“You? How?”

“I also overslept, and the temperature went down, and the eggs were spoiled.”

“When did that happen?”

“On the tenth day.”

“Why didn’t you say anything before?”

“I was afraid to own up. I thought perhaps the chicks hadn’t died after all, but now I know they did, and it was me who killed them.”

“And you let the boys do all that work for nothing,” said Mishka looking sternly at me, “just because you were afraid to own up.”

"Well, I thought that perhaps it would be all right. The boys would have decided to carry on in any case, otherwise we would never know whether the chicks had died or not."

"Oh, would they!" said Mishka indignantly. "Anyhow you ought to have owned up right away so we could all decide together instead of you deciding for everybody else."

"Look here," I said, "what are you shouting at me for? Why didn't you own up yourself? You also overslept, didn't you?"

"So I did," said Mishka, contrite. "I'm a pig for sure. You can punch my nose if you like."

"I shan't do anything of the kind. But mind you don't go and tell the boys what I told you," I said.

"I'll tell them tomorrow. Not about you, but about myself. Let everyone know what a pig I am. That will be a punishment for me."

"All right, then I'll own up too," I said.

"No, you'd better not."

"Why not?"

"Well, you know them. They always laugh at us because we do everything together. We go to school together, do our lessons together and even get low marks together. Now they'll say we overslept our watch together too."

"Let them say what they like," I said. "Besides, I couldn't stand by and let them laugh at you, could I?"

WHEN ALL HOPE FLED

That sad day drew to a close and evening came again. The situation in the kitchen remained unchanged: the incubator was warm, the lamp still burned, but our hopes were dead. Mishka sat silently staring at the egg in his hand. We couldn't make up our minds whether to crack

it open or wait a while. All of a sudden Mishka sat up with a start and stared at me with wide-open eyes. I thought he had seen a ghost behind me and I turned round quickly. But there was nothing there. I turned back to Mishka.

“Look!” he said hoarsely, stretching out his hand with the egg in it.

At first I couldn’t see anything at all, but then I saw what looked like a small crack in one spot.

“Did you knock it against something?”

Mishka shook his head.

“Then—then—the chick did it?”

Mishka nodded.

“Are you so sure?”

Mishka shrugged his shoulders.

I carefully lifted the bit of broken shell with my nail, making a small hole in the egg. The same moment a tiny yellow beak thrust itself through the hole and then disappeared.

We were so excited we couldn’t speak and just hugged each other with joy.

“Hurrah! It’s happened!” shouted Mishka and burst out laughing. “Now where shall we run to? Where shall we go first?”

“Wait a minute!” I said. “What’s the rush? Where are you off to?”

“We’ve got to run and tell the boys!” He rushed to the door.

“Wait!” I said. “Put the egg back first. You aren’t going to take it with you, I hope.”

Mishka came back and put the egg into the incubator. At that moment Kostya came.

“We’ve got a chick already!” shouted Mishka.

“You’re fibbing!”

“Word of honour!”

“Where is it?”

Mishka lifted the incubator lid and Kostya looked inside.

"Where's the chick? All I see is eggs."

Mishka had forgotten where he had put the egg with the crack in it and now he couldn't find it. Finally he chanced on it and showed it triumphantly to Kostya.

Kostya squealed with delight. "Look, there's a real chicken's beak sticking out of it!" he cried.

"Of course it's real. Did you think it was some circus trick, or what?"

"Wait, fellows. You hang on to that egg and I'll go and call the others," said Kostya.

"That's right, go and get them. They didn't believe there would be any chicks at all. No one came in all evening."

"That's where you're mistaken. They're all at my place and they still believe in the chicks, but they were afraid to bother you, so they sent me to find out how things were coming along."

"Why were they afraid?"

"Well, they knew how badly you must be feeling about it and they didn't want to be in the way."

Kostya ran out and we heard him go clattering down the stairs, three steps at a time.

"Golly!" cried Mishka. "I haven't told Mother yet!" He ran to call his mother, and I snatched up the egg and ran off to show it to my mother.

Mother looked at it and told me to run and put it back in the incubator at once, otherwise it might cool down and the chicken would catch cold.

I rushed back to Mishka's place and there he was in the kitchen all excited and his mother and father were standing laughing at him. As soon as he saw me Mishka pounced on me:

“Did you see where I put that egg? I’ve turned the whole incubator upside down and I can’t find it anywhere!”

“What egg?”

“You know . . . the one with the chick in it!”

“Here it is,” I said.

When Mishka saw the egg in my hands he nearly had a fit.

“You silly ass! What do you mean by picking up the egg and running off with it!”

“Hush,” said Mishka’s mother. “All that fuss about an egg!”

“But, Mother, it isn’t an ordinary egg. Look at it!”

Mishka’s mother took the egg and looked at the tiny little beak showing through the hole. His dad looked at it too.

“Hm,” he said smiling. “Remarkable!”

“There’s nothing remarkable about it,” said Mishka with an important air. “It’s just a natural phenomenon.”

“You’re a natural phenomenon yourself,” laughed Mishka’s dad. “There’s nothing remarkable about the chicken of course. What’s remarkable is that it hatched out in your incubator. I must admit I didn’t think anything would come of it.”

“Why didn’t you say anything then?”

“Why should I? I’d rather you spent your time breeding chickens than running wild in the street.”

At that point Maya came into the kitchen. She was just up from bed, and her dress was on back to front, and her shoes were on her bare feet. We allowed her to hold the egg for a minute or two. She put her eye to the hole and just then the chick stuck out its beak.

Maya screamed. “He wanted to peck me!” she cried. “You naughty little chick, you! Not out of your shell and fighting already.”

“You mustn’t shout at a new-born chick like that!” said Mishka. “You’ll frighten it.” He took the egg and laid it back in the incubator.

At that moment there was a noise outside on the stairs and the sound of running feet. Soon the kitchen was full of boys. The egg had to be taken out again and shown around. Everybody wanted to look into the hole and see the chick.

"Fellows," cried Mishka. "Give us back the egg. We've got to put it back in the incubator, or the chicken will catch cold."

But no one paid any attention to him. We had to take the egg away by force.

"Aren't there any cracks in the other eggs yet?" Vitya asked.

We inspected the other eggs but there was no sign of any more cracks.

"No, No. 5 is the only one. The rest have no cracks," said Mishka.

"Perhaps they'll hatch out later on," said the boys.

"It doesn't matter," said Mishka. "Even if only one chick hatches out I'll be happy. At least we shan't have had all that trouble for nothing!"

"Shouldn't we break open the shell and let the chick out?" said Senya Bobrov. "He must be uncomfortable, sitting in there."

"Oh no," said Mishka. "You mustn't touch the shell. The chick's skin is still too tender and you can hurt it."

It was quite some time before the boys finally left. Everyone wanted to be there to see the chick climb out of the shell, but it was already late and they had to go home.

"Never mind," Mishka said. "This won't be the only chick. You'll see, the others will soon begin hatching out too."

When the boys had gone Mishka examined the eggs once more and found another crack.

"Look," he shouted. "No. 11 is beginning to hatch out too!"

I looked and sure enough there was a crack on the egg which had the number "11" written on it.

"What a pity the boys went away," I said. "Now it's too late to run for them."

"Yes, it is a pity!" murmured Mishka. "But never mind, tomorrow they'll see the chicks already hatched."

We sat down by the incubator, nearly bursting with happiness.

"You and me are certainly the lucky ones," said Mishka. "I bet very few people are as lucky as we are."

Night came. Everyone had gone to bed long ago but Mishka and I didn't feel the least bit sleepy.

The time went very fast. At about two o'clock in the morning another two eggs cracked: Nos. 8 and 10. And the next time we looked into the incubator there was a real surprise waiting for us. There among the eggs sat a tiny new-born chick. It was trying to stand on its legs, but it kept toppling over.

I nearly choked with happiness.

I picked up the chick. It was still wet and instead of feathers it had silky yellow down sticking untidily all over its tender pink back.

Mishka opened up the pot and I put the chick inside and we added hot water to the pan underneath so the chick should be warm.

"It's very warm in there, he'll soon dry up and look nice and fluffy," said Mishka.

He took the two halves of the shell out of the incubator.

"It's a wonder how such a huge chick could fit into such a little shell!"

And the chick really did look huge compared with the shell. But, after all, he had been curled up inside it, with his legs tucked up



under him and his head twisted round, and now he had straightened out and was standing on his spindly little legs with his neck stretched out.

Mishka was looking at the broken shell when suddenly he cried out: "Look, this is the wrong chick!"

"What do you mean, the wrong chick?"

"It's not the first one! The first one that cracked the shell was No. 5, this is No. 11."

Sure enough the shell had the figure 11 written on it.

We looked into the incubator. No. 5 was still lying where we had laid it.

"What's the matter with it?" I said. "It was the first to crack the shell and now it won't come out!"

"It's probably too weak to break the shell itself," said Mishka. "Let it lie a little while, perhaps it'll get stronger."

OUR MISTAKE

We were so busy that we did not notice that morning had come until we saw the sun shining in the window. Jolly sunbeams played on the kitchen floor, making the room look bright and gay.

"You'll see, the boys will be coming in soon," said Mishka. "They won't be able to hold out."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when two of them arrived—Zhenya and Kostya.

"Want to see a miracle?" cried Mishka and he picked the new-born chicken out of the warming-pan. "There! A miracle of nature."

The boys examined the chick solemnly.

"And three more eggs have cracked," Mishka boasted. "Look, Nos. 5, 8 and 10."

The chick evidently didn't like the cold. When we held him in our hands he began to fidget, but as soon as we put him back into the pan he quieted down.

"Have you fed him?" asked Kostya.

"Oh no," said Mishka. "It's too soon to feed him. You only feed them the day after they're hatched."

"I bet you haven't slept all night," Zhenya said.

"No. . . . We've been far too busy."

"Then you'd better go and take a nap and we'll take over for a while," suggested Kostya.

"All right. But promise you'll wake us if another chick appears."

"Of course."

Mishka and I lay down on the couch and went to sleep at once. To tell the truth I had felt sleepy for a long time. The boys woke us up at about ten o'clock.

"Come and look at miracle No. 2!" cried Kostya.

"Miracle number what?" I muttered, still half asleep. I looked round and saw that the kitchen was full of boys.

"Here it is!" they cried and pointed to the saucepan.

Mishka and I jumped up and ran to look into the pan. There were two chicks there now. One of them was fluffy and round and as yellow as egg powder. A real beauty!

"Isn't he splendid!" I said. "Why is the first one so mangy looking?"

The boys laughed. "That one is the first one!"

"Which one?"

"The fluffy one."

"No, it isn't. It's that skinny one."

"The skinny one has just hatched out. The first one has dried up and that's why he's fluffy."

"Isn't that great!" I said. "Then the second one will be fluffy too when he dries?"

"Of course."

"What number is that?" Mishka asked.

The boys looked puzzled.

"I thought you knew all the eggs are numbered," said Mishka.

"No, we didn't look for any number," said Kostya.

"We can see by the shell," I said. "The shell must still be inside."

Mishka looked into the incubator and let out a yell:

"Look! There's another two brand-new chicks in there!"

Everybody made a dash for the incubator. Mishka carefully took out two new chicks and showed them to us.

"There they are, the eagles!" said Mishka proudly.

We put them into the warming-pan with the other two. Now we had four chicks. They sat huddled together for warmth.

Mishka took the broken shells out of the incubator and looked for the numbers.

"Nos. 4, 8 and 10," he said. "But which is which?"

Of course you couldn't tell now what shell they had hatched from. The boys laughed.

"The numbers are all mixed up!"

"No. 5 is still lying there in the incubator," I said.

"So it is," cried Mishka. "What's the matter with it? Maybe it's dead?"

We got out No. 5 and widened the hole a little. The chick was lying quietly inside. It moved its head.

"Hurrah, it's alive!" we shouted and laid it back inside the incubator.

Mishka checked over the remaining eggs and found another crack, in No. 3. The boys clapped their hands.

Things were really humming at last!

After a while Maya came in. We showed her the chicks.

"That one is mine!" she said, trying to snatch at the fluffy one.

"Just a minute," I said. "Don't snatch. He has to sit there in the warming-pan for a while, otherwise he'll catch cold."

"All right, I'll take him later on. But the fluffy one will be mine. I don't want the skinny one."

It was Sunday. Since there was no school that day the boys spent the whole day in our kitchen. Mishka and I sat in the place of honour, beside the incubator. To the right, near the stove, stood the warming-pan with the new-born chicks inside, on the stove was the pot of hot water, and on the window-sill were the boxes with the oats which were already a bright green. The boys laughed, cracked jokes and told all sorts of interesting stories.

"Have you figured out why they didn't hatch out when they were supposed to?" one of the boys asked. "You expected them on Friday."

"I can't think what happened," replied Mishka. "The book says that they are supposed to hatch out on the twenty-first day and this is the twenty-third. Maybe the people who wrote the book made a mistake."

"If anyone made a mistake, it's you," said Lyosha Kurochkin. "When did you put the eggs in the incubator?"

"On the third. It was on a Saturday. I remember perfectly because the next day was Sunday."

"Listen here," said Zhenya Skvortsov. "There's something wrong: you put the eggs in on Saturday and the twenty-first day comes out on Friday."

"He's right," said Vitya Smirnov. "If you started on Saturday, the twenty-first day ought to be on Saturday. There are seven days in a week and twenty-one days makes exactly three weeks."

"Three times seven is twenty-one!" laughed Senya Bobrov. "At least that's what the multiplication table says."

"I don't know about the multiplication table but that's how we figured it," said Mishka huffily.

"How did you count?"

"I'll tell you," said Mishka, counting on his fingers. "The 3rd was the first day, the 4th was the second, the 5th, the third. . . ."

He counted all the way up to Friday and got twenty-one days.

Senya looked puzzled. "That's funny. According to the multiplication table the twenty-first day comes on Saturday, and when you count on your fingers it comes out on Friday."

"Show us again how you counted," said Zhenya.

"Look," said Mishka, bending his fingers again, "Saturday, the 3rd, was the first day, Sunday, the 4th, was the second day. . . ."

"Just a minute! You're wrong! If you began on the 3rd, you shouldn't count that day."

"Why?"

"Because the day wasn't over. It didn't pass until the 4th. That means you ought to count from the 4th."

Suddenly Mishka and I both saw it in a flash. Mishka tried counting the new way and it came out right.

"Of course," he said. "The twenty-first day was yesterday."

"Then everything came out as it should have," I said. "We put the eggs in the incubator on Saturday evening, and the first crack appeared on Saturday evening. Exactly twenty-one days later."

"You see how much trouble you can avoid by knowing how to count properly," said Vanya Lozhkin.

Everyone laughed.

"Yes," said Mishka, "if we hadn't made that blunder we could have saved ourselves a lot of worry and bother."

BIRTHDAY

By the end of that day there were already ten chickens sitting in our warming-pan. The last to appear was No. 5. He didn't want to come out of his shell for anything and we had to break off the top to help him out. If we hadn't done that he would still have been sitting there. He was smaller than the other birds and weaker, probably because he had been in the shell so long.

Towards evening only two eggs were left in the incubator. They looked very sad lying there all by themselves and there was still no sign of a crack on them. We kept the lamp on in the incubator but they didn't hatch out that night either. All the new-born chicks spent the night very comfortably in the warming-pan and in the morning we let them down on the floor—ten yellow balls of fluff cheeping for all they were worth. They blinked their little eyes and turned away from the bright light. Some stood quite firmly on their little legs, others were still wobbly. Some even tried to run but they weren't very good at it. Sometimes they pecked with their little beaks at small spots on the floor and even at the shiny heads of nails on the floor-boards.

"Look at that, they're hungry!" cried Mishka.

We quickly boiled an egg, chopped it up fine and spread it on the floor, but the chicks didn't know what to do with it. We tried to feed them out of our hands.

"Eat, you silly things," we said. But the chicks didn't even look at the food. Just then Mishka's mother came into the kitchen.

"They won't eat any egg, Mum," Mishka said.

"You must teach them."

"How? We told them to eat but they won't listen to us."

"That's not the way to teach chicks. You have to tap on the floor with your finger."

Mishka sat down beside the chicks and tapped on the floor next to the egg crumbs. The chicks watched the finger pecking at the food and they began imitating it. In a few minutes they had eaten up all the egg. Then we put down a saucer of water and they drank it up. You didn't have to teach them that. Then they got into a huddle and we put them back in the pan to warm up.

When Marya Petrovna came to class that day we all ran to meet her with the news that our chicks had hatched out. She was very pleased.

"So this is your chicks' birthday," she said. "I congratulate you."

We all laughed, and Vitya Smirnov said: "We must have a birthday party for them. Let's have it today."

Everyone approved of the idea. "Yes, let's, let's. Marya Petrovna, will you come to our chicks' birthday party?"

"Thank you, I'll come with pleasure," Marya Petrovna said, smiling. "I'll bring them a present too."

"We must all bring them presents!" the boys cried.

When we came home from school Mishka and I waited impatiently for the guests to arrive. We were dying to see what sort of presents our chicks would get.

Senya Bobrov came first with a bouquet of flowers.

"What's that for?" said Mishka.

"For the chickens. That's my present."

"Whoever heard of flowers for chicks. They can't eat flowers, can they?"

"They don't have to eat them. They'll look at them and smell them."

"What an idea! As if they haven't seen flowers before."

"Of course, they haven't. Get me a jar to put them in. You'll see how nice they'll look."

We got a jar and put the flowers in water. The next to arrive were Seryozha and Vadik. They both brought bunches of snowdrops.

"What is everybody bringing flowers for?" said Mishka scowling.

"Don't you like our presents?" said Vadik offended. "It isn't nice to look gift horses in the mouth."

We put their flowers in water too.

Then Vanya Lozhkin came and brought half a kilo of oatmeal. Mishka looked doubtful: "I'm afraid they won't eat it."

"You can try," said Vanya.

"No, we'd better wait and ask Marya Petrovna."

Just then Marya Petrovna came. She carried something wrapped in newspaper. It turned out to be a bottle filled with what looked like milk.

"Milk!" shouted Mishka. "We never thought of giving them milk!"

"This is buttermilk," said Marya Petrovna. "It is just what they need for the first few days. You'll see how they like it."

We let the chicks out of the pot and poured the buttermilk into a saucer and gave it to them. They drank it up with gusto.

"That's what I call a real present for chicks," said Mishka delighted. "You have to know what to bring to a chickens' birthday party."

The guests kept coming one after another. Vitya and Zhenya brought millet. Then Lyosha Kurochkin came running in with a baby's rattle.

"I couldn't think what to bring, and I saw these rattles in a shop on the way here, so I bought them one."

"A brilliant idea, I must say," said Mishka sarcastically. "The perfect birthday gift for a chicken."

"How was I to know what to buy? Besides, they might like the rattle for all you know."

He ran over to the chickens and shook the rattle over their heads. They stopped pecking at the buttermilk and lifted their heads to listen.

"See that!" cried Lyosha overjoyed. "They like it!"

Everyone laughed. "All right," Mishka said. "Now let them eat in peace."

I asked Marya Petrovna whether we could feed them oatmeal. She said they ate any sort of meal provided it was cooked.

"How do you cook it?" Mishka wanted to know.

"Just the way you cook porridge," said Marya Petrovna.

Mishka and I wanted to cook the porridge at once but just then another guest arrived—Kostya Devyatkin.

"Have you brought a present?" the boys demanded.

"Of course I have," said Kostya, pulling two pies out of his pocket.

"What a funny present," laughed the boys.

"You always have pies at birthday parties, don't you?" said Kostya.

"What's inside them?" Mishka asked suspiciously.

"Rice."

"Rice?" cried Mishka.

He snatched the pies out of Kostya's hand and began scooping the rice out of them.

"Hey! What're you doing!" said Kostya. "Don't you believe me?"

But Mishka didn't answer. He scooped the rice out on to a saucer and put it in front of the chicks. They began pecking at it right away.

When Maya saw that everyone had brought gifts for the chicks she went to her room and brought a piece of red ribbon, cut it into little strips and tied a red bow round each chick's neck. We put the jars of flowers down on the floor near the chicks, and what with the flowers, the ribbons, and the saucers of buttermilk, rice and fresh water, it



really did begin to look like a birthday party. Kostya wanted to feed them grass, but Marya Petrovna said they were too young for greens, and we had better wait till tomorrow.

After the chicks had enough to eat and drink we took off their ribbons and put them back into the warming-pan. Marya Petrovna advised us to fence off a part of the kitchen for them and keep a pot of hot water to warm themselves against.

"The best thing would be to take them to the country. Here indoors they may get sick and die. They need fresh air," said Marya Petrovna.

We showed her our incubator and the two eggs still lying inside.

"I'm afraid those won't hatch out any more," said Marya Petrovna. "But it doesn't matter. You have done very well as it is."

"That's because all the boys pitched in and helped us," said Mishka. "We couldn't have managed by ourselves."

"I was afraid nothing would come of it because I overslept once and the temperature went down," I said.

"They can cool down quite a bit without being spoiled," said Marya Petrovna. "After all, the hen doesn't sit on her eggs all the time. Once a day she goes off to get something to eat, leaving the eggs uncovered. Incubator eggs are also cooled off once a day so as to create the natural conditions for the embryo to develop. It is much worse to overheat them."

"I overheated them once," said Mishka. "The temperature went up to 104 degrees."

"Most likely you noticed it before any serious harm was done," said Marya Petrovna. "But if you had let the temperature remain high for a long time the eggs would surely have been spoiled."

That evening we broke open the two remaining eggs. In both of them we found undeveloped embryos. Life had stopped and the chicks had died before they were born. Perhaps that was the result of overheating.

We switched off the lamp: it had burned for exactly twenty-three days. The mercury in the thermometer gradually went down. The incubator cooled off. But in the saucepan near the stove was our happy family—ten fluffy little chicks.

TO THE COUNTRY

Our little family lived very happily all together. The chicks felt quite all right so long as they were close together. But if any one of them strayed away from the others he would start cheeping nervously and running about looking for his brothers, and he wouldn't calm down until he had found them.

Maya had wanted to take her chick away from the very beginning, but we wouldn't let her. Then one day she said she wouldn't wait any more and she picked one of the chicks up and took it to her room. Half an hour later she came back all in tears:

"I can't bear it! It breaks my heart to hear him cry. I thought he'd get used to it after a little while, but he keeps crying so pitifully I can't stand it!"

As soon as she put the chick on the floor he made straight for the other chicks huddled together in the corner.

We fenced off a corner of the kitchen for them, spread a piece of oilcloth on the floor and put an iron pot of hot water on it. We covered the pot with a pillow to keep the water from cooling down too quickly. The chicks nestled under the pillow around the warm pot and felt as comfy as if they were nestling under the mother-hen's wings. The pot with hot water took the place of the brood-hen.

Sometimes we took them out into the yard, but it was dangerous for them there: too many stray dogs and cats prowling about. So they spent most of the time indoors, and we were very much afraid that they were not getting enough fresh air. One chick worried us particularly. He was smaller than the others and less lively. He was a thoughtful sort of chick. He often sat quietly by himself instead of running around with the others and he ate very little. That was No. 5, the one that had hatched out last.

"We really ought to pack them up and take them to the country," said Mishka. "I'm afraid they might get sick."

But we could not bear the thought of parting with them and so we kept putting it off from day to day.

One morning Mishka and I came to feed the chicks as usual. By now they had learned to know us and they came running from under the warm pot to meet us. We had brought them a plate of millet

gruel, and they set to it with gusto, pushing one another out of the way and jumping over one another's head, each one trying to get ahead of the others. One of them even got on the plate with his feet.

"Where's No. 5?" said Mishka.

No. 5 usually hung behind the others. Since he was the weakest he got pushed aside and we usually had to feed him separately. Sometimes he didn't eat anything, but he always came running with the others because he didn't want to be left alone. But this time there was no sign of him. We counted the chicks and found that one was missing.

"Perhaps he's hiding behind the pot?" I said. I looked behind the pot and there he was lying on the floor. I thought he was just taking a rest. I stretched out my hand and picked him up. His little body was quite cold and his head hung down lifelessly on his skinny little neck. No. 5 was dead.

We stared at him for a long time, feeling so sad we could not speak.

"It's our fault!" Mishka said at last. "We ought to have taken him to the country. He would have got nice and strong there in the fresh air."

We buried him in the back yard under a lime-tree, and the very next day we packed the others in a basket and set out for the country. All the boys came to see us off.

Maya wept bitterly when she kissed her own chick good-bye. She wanted terribly to keep him, but she was afraid he would be lonesome for his little brothers, and so she agreed to let us take him to the country.

We covered the basket with a shawl and went off to the station. The chicks were warm and comfortable in the basket. They sat quietly all the way, cheeping softly to one another now and again. The passengers looked at us curiously when they heard the chicks cheeping and guessed what we had in the basket.

"Well, my young poultry farmers, you've come for more eggs, I suppose?" laughed Aunt Natasha when she saw us.

"No," said Mishka. "We've brought you some chicks instead."

Aunt Natasha peeped into the basket.

"Heavens alive!" she cried. "Where on earth did you get all those chicks?"

"We hatched them in our own incubator."

"You're joking. You must have bought them in some bird shop."

"No, Aunt Natasha. Remember those eggs you gave us a month ago? Well, we've brought them back to you, but now they're chicks."

"Well I never!" cried Aunt Natasha. "You'll want to be poultry farmers or something like that when you grow up, I suppose."

"We don't know yet," said Mishka.

"But aren't you sorry to part with the chicks?"



"We are, terribly," replied Mishka. "But you see, it isn't good for them to live in town. Here the air is pure and fresh and they have more room to run about. They'll grow up into fine strong birds. The hens will lay eggs for you and the cocks will crow. One of the chicks died and we buried him under the lime-tree."

"You poor dears," said Aunt Natasha, putting her arms round Mishka and me. "But never mind. It can't be helped. All the others are fine and strong."

We let the chicks out of the basket and watched them romping about in the sunshine. Aunt Natasha said she heard her hen clucking, and Mishka and I ran with her to the shed to look at it. She was sitting in a basket with hay sticking out on all sides. She looked sternly at us as if she was afraid we had come to take her eggs away.

"That's good," said Mishka. "Now our chicks will have playmates. They will have lots of fun."

We spent all day in the country. We went for a walk in the woods and took a dip in the river. The last time we had been there it was early spring and the fields had been still bare. At that time the tractors had been busy in the fields turning up the soil. Now the fields were covered with green shoots which spread in a huge green carpet as far as you could see.

It was lovely in the woods. All sorts of beetles and other insects crawled about in the grass, butterflies fluttered about everywhere and birds sang on every tree. It was so beautiful that we didn't want to go home. We decided we would come here in the summer, build a tent on the river-bank and live there like Robinson Crusoe.

But finally it was time to go. We went back to Aunt Natasha's to say good-bye. She gave us each a piece of cake to eat in the train and made us promise to come to her for the summer holidays. Before leaving, we went into the back yard for a last look at the chicks. They

seemed quite at home already and were running about among the trees and bushes cheeping merrily. But they still kept close together and went on cheeping so that if any of them strayed away in the grass he could easily find the others.

“Good-bye, jolly family!” said Mishka. “Have a nice time in the fresh air and sunshine, get big and strong and grow up to be fine healthy birds. Always keep together and stand up for one another. Remember you are all brothers, children of the same mother . . . er . . . I mean the same incubator, where you all lay side by side when you were still plain ordinary eggs and couldn’t run about or talk . . . er . . . cheep, I mean. . . . And don’t forget us because we made the incubator, and that means if it wasn’t for us you wouldn’t be here and you wouldn’t know how wonderful it is to be alive!”

That’s all.





KOLYA SINITSIN'S DIARY



May 28

This is a great day for me—school is over and I have been passed into the next form with top marks. Tomorrow we break up for the summer holidays. I have decided to keep a diary during the holidays. Mother says she will buy me a fountain-pen if I promise to write regularly in my diary. So I have bought a thick writing-pad with a blue cover and now I am going to write down all the interesting things that happen to me. Whenever something interesting happens I shall take out my diary and write it down. I also intend to write down my thoughts. I shall think about all sorts of things and as soon as some clever thought comes into my head I shall write it down. There is nothing interesting to write about today. No thoughts either.

May 29

Nothing interesting happened today either. The same applies to thoughts. That is perhaps because I spent all my free time playing out in the yard with the boys and I had no time to think. Never mind. Something may turn up tomorrow.

May 30

Again nothing happened. No thoughts either for some reason. In fact, I don't know what to write about. Perhaps I ought to invent something? But that wouldn't be a diary. In a diary everything has to be true.

May 31

Today we had a meeting of our Young Pioneer group. Yura Kuskov, our group leader, spoke.

"Well, boys," he said, "summer is here and the holidays have begun. Some of you may perhaps think that in summer-time you needn't do anything except play. But that's a mistake. Real Pioneers carry on with their work all the year round, they never waste time. So let's think of something interesting to do this summer, something we can all do together."

We thought and thought, but no one could think of anything. Then Vitya Almazov said:

"We could work on our vegetable plot."

"Too late," said Yura. "The Second group thought of that first. They have already planted cucumbers and tomatoes and pumpkins."

"Let's plant trees in the school garden," suggested Zhenya Shemyakin.

"Just a couple of months late," said Yura. "Trees must be planted early in spring. Besides, there's no room for any more trees."

"Let's collect postage stamps," said Fedya Ovsyannikov. "I love stamp-collecting."

"That's not much of an occupation for the whole group. We can each collect stamps for ourselves."

"We could collect candy wrappers then," ventured Grisha Yakushkin.

"Candy wrappers!" scoffed Pavlik Grachyov. "You'll be suggesting we collect match-boxes next. What's the good of collecting things like that. It's useful work we want."

We racked our brains but we couldn't think of anything suitable. Yura told us to go home and think it over. In a couple of days we would get together again and discuss the different proposals.

I went home intending to think but I went out to play with the boys in the yard for a while before dinner and forgot all about it. After dinner I played some more, then I came home and had supper and went out again. In the evening I sat down to write my diary, but Mum said it was time for bed. Then I remembered I was supposed to think about work for the summer. But you can think just as well lying down as sitting up. So I'll go to bed and do my thinking there.

June 1

Last night I went to bed and began to think. But instead of thinking about work for the summer, all sorts of other thoughts kept coming into my head. I thought about seas and oceans and all the sharks and whales that live in the ocean, and I wondered why whales were so big and what would happen if whales lived on land and walked about the streets, and where we would live if a whale should bump into our house.

Oh dear, I said to myself, that isn't what I ought to be thinking of at all. I tried hard to keep my mind on summer work, but all I could think of was animals—horses and donkeys. I wondered why horses were big and donkeys little; perhaps horses are only big donkeys,

after all. And why do camels have humps, and elephants trunks, and what if camels had trunks as well as humps, would they be camels or camel-haired elephants?

There I was right off the track again, and no matter how I tried, my thoughts kept wandering all over the place. I saw that with a head like mine it was no use even trying to think, and so I fell asleep.

June 2

Hurrah! Mother has given me a fountain-pen! Now I shall only write with my new pen. The trouble is there is nothing to write about. I have been racking my brains for a whole hour but I simply can't think of anything to write. It isn't my fault if nothing exciting ever happens, is it?

June 3

This morning when I went outside who did I see but Grisha Yakushkin coming down the street.

"Hey, where are you off to?" I asked him.

"I'm going to the Young Naturalists' circle at school."

"Can I come with you?"

"Of course, come along."

On the way we met Yura Kuskov. He was also going to the circle. When everybody had assembled, our teacher Nina Sergeevna, who leads the circle, took us into the garden and showed us how flowers are made. She told us about the stamens and the yellow dust called pollen which is carried from one flower to another by bees and other insects: the pollen sticks to their feet when they alight on the flower and they fly off with it to the next flower. This is called polli-

nation. The flower that is pollinated bears seed, but if no pollen gets on it there will be no fruit. That is how insects help to increase the harvest, because if they didn't spread the pollen there would be no seed.

Bees do more to increase the harvest than any other insects because they fly about all day long from flower to flower gathering nectar. That is why there should be as many apiaries as possible.

After the class, Yura called the Pioneer group together and asked us what ideas we had for the summer. No one had anything to suggest. Yura said we would have to put our thinking caps on properly or summer would be over before we thought of anything. He was just about to close the meeting when Grisha Yakushkin said:

"Let's make a beehive and keep bees."

We all thought that a splendid idea.

"Yes, that will do nicely," said Yura. "Bees are very useful. Besides making honey they help to increase the harvest."

"Hurrah!" cried Pavlik Grachyov. "We'll build a beehive in the school garden and start the first school apiary. Our group will get famous!"

"Wait a bit," said Yura. "We don't even know how to make a hive!"

Yura was right. We hadn't the least idea how to begin.

"Let's go and ask Nina Sergeyevna. She ought to know," said Yura.

We ran over to the school and asked Nina Sergeyevna to tell us about beehives. We told her about our plan to keep bees.

"Where will you get the bees?"

"We'll catch them," said Seryozha.

"Catch them? How?"

"With our hands, of course."

Nina Sergeyevna burst out laughing. "If you try to catch your bees one by one they will never stay with you. Bees live in large communities. Your bees will fly away from your hive at the first opportunity and go back to their families."

"What are we to do then?"

"You must get a whole bee family, a swarm it is called."

"Where can we get it?"

"You can order it by mail," Nina Sergeyevna replied.

"By mail?"

"Yes, you must write to some big apiary and ask them to send you a swarm."

"We don't know what apiary to write to."

"I'm afraid I don't know offhand either," said Nina Sergeyevna. "But I shall try to find out for you."

She told us how beehives are made. It's quite simple. All you need is a large wooden box with holes in it. You put the bees inside and they build the hive themselves out of wax and fill it with honey. But they build the cells right against the walls of the box, which makes it hard to get at the honey. So bee-keepers put wooden frames covered with a thin layer of wax into the box. The bees build their own comb on the wax, and when the honey is made the bee-keeper simply removes the frames.

We decided to start building a hive right away. Tolya Pesotsky said we could work in his shed. Yura told us all to bring whatever tools we could get.

When I went home I thought about bees. Imagine being able to get bees by mail! Isn't that interesting?

June 4

This morning we all met at Tolya Pesotsky's shed. Vitya Almazov brought a saw, Grisha Yakushkin had an axe, Yura Kuskov came with a chisel, a pair of pliers and a hammer, Pavlik Grachyov had a plane and a hammer. I had a hammer as well, so that made three.

"Where are we going to get the wood to make it with?" said Ser-yozha.

We had no boards and we didn't know where to find any.

"That's a good one!" said Yura. "We can't make a hive without boards."

"Oh, there must be some old boards lying about somewhere."

We all went off to hunt for boards. We searched all the sheds and attics, but we couldn't find any.

"Let's go to Galya. She may help us," said Yura.

Galya is our senior Pioneer leader. We went to her and told her our trouble.

"I can ask the Head Master. Perhaps he will let us take some of the boards that were left over after the last repairs."

The Head Master gave us permission to take four large boards. We dragged them over to our shed and got down to work in real earnest, sawing, planing, hammering for all we were worth. Tolya went around shouting and ordering everybody about. He thinks just because it's his shed he can boss the rest of us. I nearly had a row with him. He needed a hammer, so instead of looking for it calmly, he starts yelling:

"Where's the hammer? I had it a minute ago and now it's disappeared."

"It should be here somewhere," said Yura. "I just knocked in a nail."

"Where did you stick it then?"

"I didn't stick it anywhere."

"You'd better look for it."

"Look for it yourself."

He hunted all over but he couldn't find it anywhere.

Everybody stopped working to hunt for the hammer. Finally it turned up—in my hand!

"What are you standing there for like a dummy?" Tolya pounced on me. "Can't you see we're hunting high and low for the hammer?"

"How did I know you were looking for this one? We've got three hammers, haven't we?"

"What's the good of having three when you can't lay your hands on one when you want it."

"Well, you needn't kick up such a row," I said. "I have a right to use the hammer as well as you have. We all want to work."

We didn't finish the hive today because the sun went down and it was too dark to work in the shed after that.



June 5

Hurrah! The hive is ready. There it is—I have drawn a picture of it here in the margin. The thing in the air is the lid. The opening at the bottom of the hive is the “main entrance.” The hole on top is another door, a sort of “emergency exit.” The little ledge at the bottom is for the bees to perch on when they fly back to the hive. It is called the alighting-board. The lid is separate so it can be taken off when you have to remove the frames. We also made twelve frames.



Yura went to Nina Sergeyevna to ask about the bees, but she hadn't had time to make any inquiries yet. What if she doesn't manage to find out anything, what shall we do with our hive?

June 6

I went around all day today asking people where to get bees from, but nobody could tell me. I felt pretty blue all morning. When I came home I found Uncle Alyosha there.

“Well, young man,” he said. “Why so glum?”

“I want some bees and I don't know where to get them.”

“What on earth do you want bees for?”

I told Uncle Alyosha all about our plan to keep bees. “But where are we going to find the bees?”

“Wait a minute,” said Uncle Alyosha. “I once knew a bee-keeper back in the village. If I remember right, he used to catch bees with a trap.”

"What sort of a trap?"

"It was a plywood box with a hole in it, something like a bird-house. He'd put some honey inside and hang it on a tree in the woods. The smell of the honey attracted the bees and sometimes a whole swarm would settle in the box. Then he'd take the box back home and transfer the bees to a regular hive. You could make a trap like that yourself and when you go to the country with your mother you could put it on a tree in the forest. You may get a swarm that way."

I asked Mother when we would be going to the country.

"Not so soon," she said. "I shan't get my holiday until the end of July, or perhaps August."

I went to Seryozha and told him about the trap.

"Let's make one," he said. "We'll take it to our place in the country. There's a nice forest there and a river too."

"Where is it?"

"In Shishigino, five kilometres from here."

"Could we stay there too?"

"Of course. Nobody lives there but Aunt Polya."

I ran home and asked Mum to let me go and stay at Seryozha's place in the country.

"Don't be silly," said Mother. "How can I let you go to a strange place by yourself?"

"But it's not far. It's only five kilometres. We can walk there."

"No, you can't go," said Mother. "How can you live there all by yourselves?"

"We won't be by ourselves. There's Aunt Polya."

"Aunt Polya! She would never be able to manage you boys."

"But we'd be ever so good, really we would."

"No, no," said Mother. "When I get my holiday we'll go away together. If you go without me you'll get drowned in the river, or lost in the forest, or something. Anything can happen."

I said we wouldn't bathe at all, we wouldn't even go near the river, and we wouldn't walk in the woods either, but Mother wouldn't listen. I begged and pleaded for hours until Mother threatened to tell Dad if I didn't stop. So I stopped. I didn't eat any supper and now I'm going to bed hungry. But I don't care.

June 7

I got up earlier than usual this morning and started to work on my mother again. She told me to stop it, but I didn't stop, I kept it up until she went to work. Then I went to Seryozha and he said he and Pavlik are going to the country tomorrow, and if I can't get permission to go with them they'll have to go without me. I sat home all day feeling perfectly miserable and as soon as Mother came home from work I went at her again worse than ever. She lost her temper and threatened to complain to Dad about me, but I didn't stop, because I didn't care what happened any more. At last Dad came home.

"Why shouldn't he go?" Dad said when Mother told him. "I think it's a good idea. He's a big lad now. It's time he learned to be a little independent."

Mother said Dad was always interfering and making it impossible to bring up the child (that's me) properly, and Dad said Mum wasn't bringing me up right at all, and they very nearly quarrelled. But they soon made it up and Mother went over to Seryozha's mother and they arranged everything. Seryozha's mother said we wouldn't be in anybody's way, Aunt Polya would look after us and cook our meals.

Mother calmed down after that and said she would let me go for three days and that if I was a good boy she might let me go again. I promised to be as good as anything.

All the boys were excited when they heard we were going to the country to catch bees. Yura gave us his compass so that we wouldn't lose our way in the forest. Tolya gave us a penknife; Fedya brought us a mess-tin in case we wanted to cook a meal over a camp-fire. We found a piece of plywood and made the trap. It came out quite well. We made a hole in front and a little door which could be closed when the bees were inside. We made a lid as well, like the one on the hive, so we could get at the bees.

Mother has bought all sorts of foodstuffs for me to take along—cereals, flour, butter, sugar, bread and tinned food. My knapsack is quite heavy with all that stuff in it. Seryozha's knapsack is as fat as mine. But Pavlik's is the biggest. He has the mess-tin and a water-flask and all sorts of stuff. Well, now everything is ready. I am so excited I can hardly wait for tomorrow to start out for Shishigino.

June 8

Hurrah! We're in Shishigino already. Seryozha's country place turned out to be a little wooden bungalow standing among the trees with not even a fence around it. There is a row of poles stuck in the ground, so I suppose they started making a fence but had no time to finish. The house was locked when we came and no one was about. Aunt Polyha has gone off somewhere. We waited and waited and after a while we decided to go to the woods and hang up our trap so as not to waste time. We put some honey inside the box and hung it on a tree. Then we went down to the river to bathe. The water was quite cold, but we had a fine time splashing about. Finally we came

out. We were blue with cold and our teeth were chattering and we were as hungry as wolves.

We made a fire on the bank, opened up a tin of meat and cooked it over the fire. It tasted very good. After we had eaten, we went back to the house, but Aunt Polya hadn't come back yet.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we came across a tree-hollow full of bees!" said Pavlik. "We could get a whole swarm right off."

"Yes, but how are we to find a hollow like that?"

"Let's watch some bee and see where it goes," said Pavlik. "When it gathers the nectar it will fly back to the hive, and we'll run after it and see where the swarm lives."

We saw a bee alight on a flower and we stopped to watch it. It flew from one flower to another and we crawled along after it on all fours, never letting it out of our sight.

I was soon aching all over from crawling—my arms ached and my legs and my back, but the bee kept on sucking nectar and didn't have the slightest intention of flying back to the hive.

Finally Seryozha said: "I suppose bees go back to the hive much later in the day. Let's go and have another swim. We've got plenty of time to chase bees."

We went down to the river again and had another swim. We stayed in the water until the sun went down. Then we dressed and went back to the house, but Aunt Polya hadn't come yet.

"Perhaps she has gone to town and won't be back tonight?" I said.

"Don't be silly, she must come back," said Seryozha. "Where can she be?"

"But suppose she doesn't? We'd better be going home."

"I'm not going anywhere," said Pavlik. "I'm much too tired."

"Where are we going to sleep?"



"We can ask the neighbours to take us in for the night," said Seryozha.

"No, don't let's do that," said Pavlik. "Let's make a little tent of branches and sleep out in the open."

"That's a great idea!" said Seryozha. "It will be fun sleeping in a tent. I've never done it before. But how do you make one?"

Pavlik knew how and we set to work at once. We broke off some branches, and Pavlik found four long sticks and stood them up at a slant like a pyramid and piled the branches all around them. Then we gathered a lot of dry moss and spread it on the floor of the tent to lie on, with our knapsacks for pillows. It is very cosy inside, although just a wee bit crowded.

We have decided not to go anywhere else because we are terribly tired. And no wonder. Think of all the walking we have done today—we came all the way from town, then we walked in the woods,

walked down to the river, walked back to the house again, then back to the woods, down to the river again and back to the house. We have done more walking in one day than a normal person does in a month. And we built the tent besides.

Now we are sitting on the steps of the house, resting. I am writing in my diary with my fountain-pen and Seryozha and Pavlik are admiring the view. It is a lovely, quiet evening. There is no wind. The trees are quite still. Only the aspen leaves are shivering a little. They look as if they were made of silver. The sky is clear and the big red sun is sinking behind the forest. The collective-farm cattle is being driven home. The cows shuffle along lazily. There are about fifty of them—black, brown, reddish, spotted, piebald and some even pinkish. Now the sun is half hidden. In a few minutes we shall crawl inside our tent and go to sleep. It is not dark yet, but it soon will be. There's no sense in sitting up in the dark when we have a nice comfy place to sleep in.

June 9

We didn't get much sleep last night. Here's what happened. Pavlik, being a sly one, crawled into the tent first and took a place in the centre, leaving Seryozha and me on the outside. Seryozha went to sleep right away, but I couldn't fall asleep for anything. At first I felt very comfortable, so comfortable in fact that I began to wonder why people went to the trouble of making beds with mattresses and pillows and such things when you could get along quite well without them. After a while the back of my head began to ache. I tried to imagine what was in the knapsack that could be so hard—the macaroni or the cereals. I poked the knapsack in the dark and found I'd been lying on the mess-tin.

"I must have got hold of Pavlik's knapsack by mistake," I thought and I turned it over on the other side. But there was a can of some kind on that side too. I turned the knapsack this way and that, trying to find something softer to lie on, a roll perhaps.

"What are you looking for?" Pavlik asked.

"A roll."

"What! Hungry already?"

"Don't be an ass."

"Well, what do you want a roll for?"

"To sleep on. This knapsack is hard."

"Softie!" Pavlik sneered.

"You try sleeping on a tin can and see how you like it," I retorted.

I didn't find the roll but I finally got some paper bag—the sugar, most likely—under my head and was just settling down to sleep when my back started to ache. From lying too long in one position, I suppose. I turned over on my side.

"Stop wriggling like an eel on a frying-pan!" grumbled Pavlik.

"Why can't I wriggle if I want to?"

"Because you keep pushing me, that's why!"

"Softie! Can't stand being pushed."

Pretty soon my side began to ache too. I stood it for quite a long time and tried hard to fall asleep. But it was no use. I turned over on my stomach.

"Keep still, can't you!" hissed Pavlik. "How can anyone sleep with you tossing about like that?"

"Sh, you'll be asleep in a jiffy," I said, but the words were hardly out of my mouth when the whole tent collapsed on top of us. I had accidentally kicked one of the poles out of place.

"Clumsy ass!" shouted Pavlik. "Now you've gone and done it!"

Seryozha stuck his head out from among the branches, blinking sleepily.

"What kind of a joke is this?" he growled.

"It's this clumsy elephant here," Pavlik told him. "Come on, get up and help put it up again."

We crawled out from under the ruins and started rebuilding our shelter. It was still light enough to see and we managed to finish before it got quite dark. This time I took care to dive inside first and occupy the middle place before the others got in.

"Hey, that's my place!" Pavlik objected.

"This isn't a theatre," I said. "The seats aren't numbered."

He tried to push me away, but I wouldn't budge. So he lay down on the edge, snorting in disgust. I noticed he didn't seem very comfortable either, because he turned over several times. I couldn't fall asleep myself for quite a long time either, but finally I dozed off. I don't know how long I slept, I can't even remember dreaming anything, but a terrific whack on the head woke me up. At first I couldn't make out what had happened or where I was, but then I saw that the tent had collapsed again and one of the poles had fallen right on my head. It was pitch dark. The sky was black except for the stars twinkling faintly a long way off. We crawled out again.

"Got to put it up again, I suppose," yawned Seryozha.

"How can we put it up in the dark?"

"Well, we can try. Can't very well sleep out in the open."

We groped about among the heap of branches, looking for the poles. We found three straightaway but the fourth was missing. We hunted all over for it, but when at last we found it we lost the other three. We groped around some more and finally located them all. We were just about to set them up when Pavlik said:

"Wait a minute, where's our camp?"

“What camp?”

“The place where we left our knapsacks and things.”

We started wandering about in the dark in search of our knapsacks, but they had disappeared. We gave up hunting for them and decided to build our shelter in a different place. While Pavlik knocked in the poles, Seryozha and I gathered branches.

“Come here quick!” Seryozha shouted suddenly. “I’ve found a whole pile of branches over here.”

I went over to him and sure enough there was a heap of branches lying on the ground. We picked up as many as we could carry and took them over to Pavlik. When we came back for the next batch Seryozha said:

“Just a minute, there’s something else lying here.”

“Where?”

“Here under the branches. A bag of some kind.”

I bent down and my hand touched a bag in the dark.

“So there is,” I said. “And it’s full too. Look, there’s another one next to it.”

“Fancy that!” said Seryozha. “Two bags!”

“Oh look, here’s another!” I said.

“Three bags!” cried Seryozha. “Who could have left them here?”

“Fat-head,” I said. “They’re ours.”

“Ours?”

“Of course. They’re our knapsacks.”

“So they are! Who would have thought of looking for them over here.”

We called Pavlik over and showed him our discovery. We picked up the knapsacks and carried them over to the new shelter. I walked ahead so as to dive in first, but I couldn’t find the entrance. I walked round and round, but it was closed on all sides.

“Hey, where’s the entrance?” I asked.

“Dash it all,” said Pavlik. “I forgot to leave an opening.”

He carefully removed some of the branches, and as soon as he had a space big enough he dived inside and lay down in the centre. I was too tired to argue with him, so I followed Seryozha’s example and lay down at the side without a word. There was something hard under my head again—the mess-tin or some other can—but I was so tired I fell asleep right away. Well, that’s the story.

Now it is morning. I woke up earlier than the others to write my diary. The sun is up and it is already quite hot. Fuzzy white clouds are floating in the sky and I can hear cows lowing and dogs barking over in the village. Seryozha and Pavlik are still fast asleep inside the tent. I’m going to wake them up in a minute and we’ll start breakfast going. I’m famished.

Evening of the Same Day

After breakfast we went to the woods to inspect our trap. It was empty, so we decided to try chasing the bees again and we spent the next couple of hours crawling after them. Finally Pavlik lost patience. He tried frightening the bee so as to make it fly back to its hive. He started shouting at it and swinging his arms and stamping his feet. The bee buzzed angrily over his head and suddenly he let out a terrific yell. The bee had stung him! His ear turned red and started swelling at once.

Pavlik was furious. “Damn those bees! I’ve had enough of them. You can fuss with them if you like. Oh, how my ear smart.”

“Never mind,” we told him. “It’ll stop hurting soon.”

“It’s all right for you to talk,” he cried. “You don’t know what it’s like. Oh dear, what shall I do?”

"Perhaps we ought to bandage it with a handkerchief?" I suggested.

"No," said Pavlik. "I'll go down to the river and bathe it."

He went down to bathe his ear and Seryozha and I kept up the bee-hunt. We took turns: while one watched, the other rested. We waited and waited and suddenly the bee we were watching rose up and flew away. We rushed after it but it flew so high that we lost sight of it.

"What a shame!" said Seryozha. "Now we'll have to start all over again."

Just then Pavlik came running up from the river, carrying something in his cap.

"Look what I've got!" he shouted. We ran over and looked into his cap. It was full of little live carp fish.

"Where did you find them?"

"In the bog near the river."

"How did you catch them without a rod or anything?"

"There's hardly any water in that spot. I just picked them out with my bare hands. Come on, let's make some fish soup."

We ran down to the bog and caught some more fish and cooked a delicious soup. Then we went down and caught some more fish for supper.

"There's heaps of them here," said Pavlik. "We can have fish for dinner every day."

After dinner we went back to the forest to chase bees.

"Suppose we try sprinkling some water on them. They will think it's raining and fly back to their hive."

We filled the mess-tin with water and sprinkled some of it on the first bee we saw. It crawled down the stalk of the flower and hid under

a green leaf. It must have been waiting for the rain to stop because presently it came out and sat drying itself in the sun. When it was dry, it spread its wings and flew away. We were just going to run after it when it alighted on a flower and started gathering nectar again. Seryozha took a mouthful of water and spurted it over the bee. But the bee didn't fly home. It waited until it was dry and then went on flying from flower to flower again.

"What a stubborn bee!" said Seryozha and he sprayed it again. This time the poor thing was soaked through. Even its wings shrivelled up and stuck to its back.

When the bee saw that the "rain" showed no signs of stopping, it flew away as soon as its wings had dried. We ran after it. At first it flew close to the ground, between the tree-trunks, but then it soared up and we lost sight of it. After that we tried spraying other bees, but they all acted the same way: at first they hid under a leaf, then came out to dry up in the sun, and after that they flew away and we couldn't follow a single one because they flew too high and too fast. We kept up our bee-hunt until the bees had all gone and the sun was going too. We went back to our camp and cooked our supper.

Aunt Polyá has not come back yet for some reason and we have decided to spend another night in our shelter. I think we really ought to go back home, but Seryozha and Pavlik say one more night won't matter because we will be going home tomorrow in any case. This time we have



decided to fix our shelter so it won't fall down on us in the night. Seryozha and Pavlik are busy right now, knocking the poles deeper into the ground, while I am writing down our adventures in my diary.

The sky is covered with dark-grey clouds. The air is cooler than it was and the wind has risen. What if it rains during the night? We must cover our shelter with plenty of branches to keep the rain out. I'd better stop writing and go and help Seryozha and Pavlik.

June 10

We had no adventures last night. That's because we built our shelter properly. It always pays to build properly; then you can go to sleep without being afraid that the roof will come tumbling down on your head. It didn't rain either. I woke up early. The birds woke me. It was hardly light when they started twittering and chirruping for all they were worth. I crawled out of the tent and saw that the sun wasn't up yet. The sky was a clear pale blue and white clouds, as soft and fluffy as soapsuds, were floating low over the ground. Gradually they grew bigger and rose up like steam higher and higher until they had covered the whole sky. After a while they turned a bright pink, the colour of strawberry ice-cream. I wondered what it would be like to have that much ice-cream; would we be able to eat it all? There would be enough to last us all our lives and some left over. I don't think all the people in the world could eat up so much ice-cream. While I was thinking these thoughts I saw a huge red sun rise up from the earth. At once everything began to sparkle and glow. The green grass looked greener and every blade of grass had tiny drops of dew on it that sparkled like diamonds. I woke Seryozha and Pavlik to see the beautiful sight, but before they had finished rubbing their eyes the dew had gone and there was nothing exciting to look at.

"You sleepy-heads," I said. "Snoozing like a couple of dormice in their burrow! You'll never see anything if you don't get up early."

Pavlik yawned and stretched and set to work to clean the fish for breakfast, but Seryozha said we ought to wash first. So we all trooped down to the river and had a dip. Then we went back to make breakfast. We fried the fish. We found some flour in one of the knapsacks and Pavlik made some pancakes. They weren't very good but they gave me a good idea.

"Let's try sprinkling some flour on the bees," I suggested. "That will make them heavy and they won't be able to fly so fast."

The others agreed and we sprinkled a little flour on the first bee we came across. The bee began cleaning itself at once with its feet. In a minute it had shaken off all the flour and was busy sucking nectar again.

"I know what," said Seryozha. "We ought to wet it a little first and then the flour will stick to it and the bee won't be able to brush it off so easily."

We tried that too. Seryozha took a mouthful of water and spurted it neatly on the bee and Pavlik sprinkled it with flour. The bee with flour sticking all over it began to clean itself. It rubbed its head and eyes with its front legs and its tummy and wings with its hind legs. It worked very hard until it was all clean except for a little patch of wet flour on its back. We were just about to give it another dose when it spread its wings and flew off. We dashed after it. At first it flew slowly, but then it went faster and was soon out of the woods and heading across the field. We ran after it like mad, jumping over hummocks and tree-stumps, across ditches and hollows. We followed it over a cabbage patch and suddenly came smack up against a fence. The bee flew straight over the fence and disappeared. We vaulted



over the fence after it and found ourselves in a garden. Imagine our surprise when we saw a row of beehives exactly like the one we had made. Beside one of the hives stood an old man with a white beard, staring at us in surprise.

“Well, and what have you to say for yourselves?” he asked sternly as we stood there like dummies with our eyes goggling.

“Er . . . nothing,” stammered Pavlik and climbed back over the fence.

“Why must you climb over the fence? There’s a gate!” said the old man, shaking his head reproachfully.

“ . . . I didn’t notice the gate,” said Pavlik and disappeared.

Seryozha and I were left with the old man. I was wondering which way to escape when the old man said:

“What are you young rascals doing here?”

"We . . . er . . . we made a mistake," I said.

"Our bee flew into your garden, and we were following it," Ser-yozha explained.

"Your bee?" The old man looked surprised. "Impossible! It must be my bee."

Then we noticed that the garden was full of bees. They were flying about all over the place and the air was filled with their buzzing.

"Why were you chasing the bee?" the old man asked.

We said we thought it would lead us to a tree-hollow with wild bees.

"But what do you want with bees?"

We explained that our Pioneer group had decided to go in for bee-keeping. Pavlik, who had been listening behind the fence, saw that the old man wasn't scolding us and came over to us. We told the old man about the bee-trap we had hung in the woods. He seemed quite interested.

"It is a fine thing to keep bees," he said. "A very useful occupation. But it is not easy to catch wild bees. Besides, there aren't any in these parts. The only bees you might catch with your trap are those that may stray away from the hive."

"But what are we to do?" we asked.

"I shall give you a few to start with," the old man said, "I see you really want to keep bees. Bee-keepers must help one another."

My heart leapt with joy. I thought the old man would give us the bees on the spot, but he said:

"Come back here toward evening. I have a swarm that is ready to leave the hive. I can let you have it. But you had better bring some sort of a box to put them in."

"Will our trap do?" I asked.

"Yes, that will be fine. Come back in three or four hours when it is a little cooler."

We ran back to the woods and took down our trap and now we are waiting to go to the old man. So while we wait I thought I'd write it all down in my diary. I've noticed the time goes quicker when you write. We haven't very long to wait now. I do hope the swarm will be there. That's all for just now.

Later

We have our bees at last! The old man was awfully kind. I thought all bee-keepers were cross because they get stung so often, but this one wasn't the least bit cross. He was very nice and friendly. And he kept his promise. When we came back to his garden he had the swarm ready for us in a round wooden box like a large sieve covered with a piece of cheese-cloth. Goodness, what a lot of bees there were! The box was positively thick with them. The old man took off the cheese-cloth and spilled the bees into our trap, just as if they were a bag of peas or something. We closed the trap quickly and thanked the old man. Before we left he gave us all sorts of instructions about handling bees.

He told us to empty the bees straight on to the waxed frames of the hive. For the beginning we would have to provide syrup for the bees to feed on while they gathered the nectar. To make the syrup you melt down sugar and pour it into a small glass jar, tie a piece of cloth over the neck of the jar and put it inside the hive upside down. The syrup will seep out slowly and the bees suck at it through the cloth. The old man also taught us how to make nets out of cheese-cloth to put on our heads when we opened the hive, and how to make a smoke-pot to drive the bees back into the hive. He

showed us his smoke-pot—it was a round iron bowl with a spout and a bellows attached. You fill it with bits of rotten wood and set them alight, and when you press the bellows the smoke comes out of the spout.

“Bees are fascinating little creatures,” said the old man. “Anyone who goes in for bee-keeping will love bees all his life and never give them up.”

“Why?”

“He’d be lonely without them.”

At last we said good-bye and set out for home. It was quite late before we reached town. Seryozha took the bees to his place and Pavlik and I ran home to tell our people we were back. In a little while we were at Seryozha’s place.

Seryozha’s mother asked us how we had got along in the country. We were afraid she would ask us about Aunt Polya because we didn’t know what she would say if she knew we’d been living in a shelter made of tree branches. Seryozha quickly began to talk about the old man who kept bees. His mother listened with interest to his story.

“And how is Aunt Polya?” she asked.

Before we had time to answer someone knocked at the door. It was Pavlik’s mother. She had come to call Pavlik to supper. We sighed with relief and showed her the bees and told her all about the old bee-keeper. Then Seryozha’s mother said again:

“But why don’t you tell us anything about Aunt Polya?”

We didn’t know what to say but luckily my mother came in at that moment. We showed her the bees and told her all about the old man who had given them to us. My mother also asked us how we had got along in the country.

“Oh, we got along fine.”

"I hope you didn't give Aunt Polya too much trouble."

"I don't think so," I said, not sure whether that could be called a fib or not.

"Is Aunt Polya going to visit us soon?" Seryozha's mother wanted to know.

"N-no, at least I don't think so," answered Seryozha.

"Didn't she say anything about it?"

"No, she didn't."

That was the truth, at any rate. I don't know how that conversation would have ended but just then there was another knock at the door and we sighed with relief again. But not for long. The door opened and who should walk in but Aunt Polya herself! We simply gaped.

"Good evening!" said Aunt Polya.

"Good evening," said Seryozha's mother. "We were just talking about you and wondering when you'd be coming to see us."

"There was a lorry going to town from the farm, so I took the opportunity to come and see you."

Then she turned to Seryozha and said:

"Hallo, Seryozha! I haven't seen you for a long time."

Seryozha turned as red as a beet-root.

"How's that?" says Seryozha's mother. "Didn't you see him today?"

Aunt Polya looked surprised.

"Where could I have seen him?"

"Why, in Shishigino, of course."

"But I haven't been there for three days. I've been working on the farm in Tarasovka."

It was out at last!

"Now then, where have you been?" Seryozha's mother asked us sternly.

"In . . . Shishigino," stammered Seryozha.

"But the house was locked up."

"I know it was."

"Where did you sleep?"

"We made a shelter of tree branches."

Well, there *was* a fuss! They all started talking at once—my mother, Pavlik's mother and Seryozha's mother. I don't know what happened after that because my mother took me home. She was very angry with me and scolded me all the way home.

"You're a very naughty boy. I'll teach you to sleep out under the trees for two nights without my permission! That's the last time I let you go off anywhere without me."

I had to stay home and listen to that sort of thing all evening. And I was simply dying to go and look at the bees.

June 11

An awful thing happened today.

I went over to Pavlik's place in the morning and we both went to Seryozha. He was still in bed. We woke him up. He wasn't at all pleased to see us. He said he had been in the middle of a wonderful dream.

"Never mind," we said, "you'll dream the rest of it tonight. We've got to put the bees into the hive."

"You go and tell the others about the bees while I'm getting dressed."

"Where's the trap?" we asked him.

"On the balcony. I put it there last night so the bees should have plenty of fresh air."

We went on to the balcony. The trap was there, but the little door was wide open and the bees were flying around all over the place.

"Oh you—idiot!" Pavlik yelled at him. "The bees have all flown away while you snoozed."

Seryozha came running out on to the balcony.

"Don't stand there gaping," he shouted. "Close the door."

"What are you shouting at us for?" says Pavlik. "We're not to blame. You're the one who left the trap open."

"I don't know how I could have forgotten to shut it," he said.

"Fat-head!" I said in disgust.

"It isn't my fault. It's all Aunt Polya. I got such a scolding I forgot all about the bees."

"I bet there aren't any left now," said Pavlik. "They've all flown away most likely."

"Perhaps there are a few left," said Seryozha. "Let's look."

I opened the lid and we all looked in. There were still quite a lot of bees inside. They flew up as soon as the lid was off. Pavlik waved his hand at them to make them go back and one of them flew out and settled on my hand. I dropped the lid in fright and tried to shake off the bee and it stung me. I yelled and slapped it dead. At that the other bees started buzzing furiously; they flew out of the trap and attacked us. Pavlik ran back into the room. Seryozha ran after him. One bee stung me in the neck, another got tangled in my hair. I ran into the room, pulling at my hair to get the bee out, but it stung my head. Pavlik was stung in the neck and on the lip. Seryozha had a sting on his nose and on the back of his neck.

We ran into the kitchen to bathe our wounds. They burned like fire. We helped one another pull the stings out but the pain didn't go away.

"It's all your fault!" cried Seryozha. "You shouldn't have waved your arms about. Bees don't like when people wave their hands."

"Don't you shout at me!" said Pavlik. "You're not the only one who got stung. Look at this one I got on my lip. It hurts dreadfully."

"What about my nose! You think that doesn't hurt!"

"You don't do anything with your nose. But I have to talk with my mouth."

"You can keep quiet for a change."

They glared at each other speechless with anger.

We sat for a long time in the kitchen, wetting our handkerchiefs under the tap and dabbing our wounds.

Suddenly Seryozha jumped up with a horrified look on his face.

"Oh dear, we left the trap open!"

We ran back into the room and looked out on to the balcony. The trap stood there with the lid off. One or two bees were circling over it but they soon flew off. We went on to the balcony and looked into the trap. It was empty.



"They've all gone!" wailed Seryozha.

"Maybe they'll come back again," I said.

"Fat chance!" said Pavlik.

Just then we saw Tolya and Yura down in the street. They noticed us and shouted:

"Hey there! So you're back!"

"Yes, we're back."

"Have you brought the bees?"

"Yes."

In a few minutes they were in the house.

"Well, where are the bees?"

"They've gone," we said. "Flown away."

"Where to?"

"Where to!" Pavlik mocked angrily. "They forgot to tell us."

"What are you so sore about? You don't need to snap at us."

We told them the whole story—how the old man had given us the bees and how the bees had flown away.

"Perhaps the old man would give us another swarm?" said Yura.

"Oh no, we couldn't ask him again. He thought we would take care of them. He wouldn't give us any more if he knew how careless we'd been."

"What are we going to do?"

"We'll have to wait. Perhaps they'll come back."

So we waited. Yura and Tolya sat with us for a while, but then they got tired and went away to tell the others what had happened.

Pretty soon the other fellows began coming one after another and we had to tell the story all over again. We were soon fed up with the whole business. Seryozha's nose was all red and swollen on one side. Pavlik's lip was so big you could hardly recognize him. And I had a big lump on my head and another on my neck.

We waited until dinner-time but not a single bee came back.

"They must have flown back to the old man's garden," said Seryozha.

"Let them!" said Pavlik. "I don't care. Even if they do come back. I shan't bother with them any more."

"Neither shall I," said Seryozha. "I don't like being stung."

I said: "I don't think much of bee-keeping either. You go to a lot of trouble to make the bees comfortable and they go and sting you and then fly away."

Just then Yura came in. "Come on," he said, "we're going to write a letter."

"To whom?"

"To the apiary. Nina Sergeyevna brought us the address. We'll write and ask them to send us some bees in a parcel."

"You can write yourselves," Pavlik said. "We're not interested in bees any more."

"Not interested?"

"No, we don't want to bother with them. We've decided to give up the whole business."

"You can't do that," said Yura. "It is the decision of the Pioneer group."

"We'll find some other work to do. Bee-keeping isn't the only work there is in the world, is it?"

Yura tried to persuade us but we stuck firm to our decision. We aren't going to have anything more to do with bees and that is final.

We've learned our lesson. Let someone else fuss with bees, we'll find something less painful to do.

June 12

I could hardly get up this morning. My neck is all swollen and it hurts so badly I can't turn my head. If I need to look to the right or left I have to turn my whole body. The bump on top of my head hurts too. So does my hand.

I went over to Pavlik's. He was at home with a compress on his neck. We didn't half curse those bees! Then Seryozha came with a swollen nose and he also cursed the bees.

After a while Grisha Yakushkin came in.

"Aren't you coming to help with the bee-keeping equipment?"

"What are you making?"

"A smoke-pot and nets to wear over our heads so the bees won't sting us when we work with them."

"They may sting you, but they won't sting us, because we're not going to have anything to do with them."

Grisha tried to argue with us.

"Nothing doing," we said. "We've had enough of bee-keeping. We tried it. Now you have a shot at it."

"That's what we're going to do."

"You'll drop it soon enough."

"No, we won't. We're not like you."

"Well, we'll see."

Grisha went off in a huff.

Let him go if he likes. Wait till they all get stung, they'll sing another tune then.

June 13

My neck doesn't hurt so much today. I can turn my head if I do it slowly. It still hurts when I turn it quickly. Pavlik's neck is also better, but not quite.

Grisha came and showed us the smoke-pot they made. He smoked up the whole room and went away. As if we never saw smoke before!

June 14

My neck has stopped aching altogether. The bump on my head is gone too. I can turn my head without any difficulty. I can even toss it and it doesn't hurt. But since I'm not a horse there's no need for me to toss my head. Nothing else interesting to write about.

June 15

This morning Pavlik and I went to Seryozha's place and played draughts. I won two games from Seryozha and one game from Pavlik, Pavlik won three games from me and none from Seryozha, and Seryozha won two games from me. After that Zhenya and Yura came running in.

"Come quickly! The bees have arrived!"

"What bees?"

"The ones we sent for. They came by parcel post. A whole box of them. Heaps and heaps of bees. And two frames with ready-made combs. Come along. We're going to put them in the hive."

We jumped up, all ready to go.

"Aha!" gloated Yura. "You said you weren't interested in bees any more!"

"Neither we are," we said, sitting down again. "As if we'd never seen bees before."

"Not like these. They're awfully nice bees!"

"All right, go ahead and kiss them if they're so nice!"

"So we will. And you will too, I bet."

They went out.

"It would be interesting to take a look at those bees," I said.

"We can't go," said Pavlik. "They'll all say we haven't any backbone."

"Why?"

"They'll say we dropped bee-keeping because we were afraid of difficulties, but we don't mind coming around so long as the others do the work. No, once we've made a decision we've got to stick to it."

"That's right," said Seryozha. "We'll show them how firm we can be."

I thought about bees all evening. I don't think bees are so bad, after all. They're fine, hard-working insects and they live very peacefully together. You never see two bees fighting, for instance.

June 16

This morning we played draughts again at Pavlik's place. But after a while I got tired of playing draughts and went home. I kept thinking about bees. Why do they sting? Is it because they are just naturally nasty or is there some other reason? I don't think it is because they are nasty. They defend themselves against enemies with their stings. If anyone attacks the hive the bees sting them. I've heard they even sting bears that come and try to steal their honey. And they're quite right. After all, they work hard storing up the honey for themselves

and not for the bears. They sting people by mistake, I suppose, because they don't know that people aren't going to harm them. True, people take their honey away, but they don't take it all. They only take as much as they need and they look after the bees and make hives for them and keep them warm and comfortable in the winter-time. It would be much worse for the bees if people didn't take care of them. They would live in tree-hollows or some other holes instead of in nice roomy hives where they get syrup to eat when there is no honey.

If you don't want to be stung you can always wear a net and use smoke to keep the bees under control. And then everything will be all right.

We made the mistake of sticking our heads right into the trap without nets on them and we were punished.

June 17

Pavlik made paper birds today and flew them about the room. Seryozha made one and dropped it off the balcony into the street. It whirled about in the air, turned a somersault and fell right in the middle of the road. After that we all started dropping them from the balcony. One of mine flew right across the street and fell on the roof of the house opposite. One of Seryozha's fell on a car that was going down the street and went off with the car. After a while I got tired of flying paper birds and went home, feeling in the dumps for some reason. And now too I feel down in the dumps and I can't think of anything to do.

June 18

We made paper birds again today and flew them from the balcony. But we soon got tired of that, so we began playing draughts, but got tired of that too. We played all sorts of other games, but we didn't get much fun out of it.

Presently Seryozha said he was fed up and went home. I didn't feel much like playing either and I went home too, feeling as down in the mouth as yesterday. I don't understand why I feel like this. Is it because I'm bored? I don't think so. When you're bored you can always play a game and you stop being bored, but when you're in the dumps you don't even want to play games.

If you ask me it comes from having nothing to do. When you're busy doing something useful you never feel blue. But when you twiddle your thumbs all day or fritter away your time with all sorts of silly nonsense you feel ashamed of yourself for wasting time and that's what puts you in the dumps.

June 19

Pavlik was out of sorts all morning and didn't want to play any games. After dinner he went off somewhere. Seryozha and I searched all over for him. We looked into all the sheds and attics but we couldn't find him. We thought he must have gone to see one of the boys, so we stopped looking for him. We didn't feel so gay ourselves either.

"If we were taking care of the bees with the others we wouldn't feel like this," said Seryozha.

"I say, let's go over and have a look at the bees while Pavlik's away," I suggested.

Seryozha brightened up. "Let's go right away before he gets back, or he'll say we haven't any backbone."

We hurried over to the school. We saw the hive in the distance as soon as we entered the garden. Someone was sitting beside it staring at the bees. It was Pavlik.

"So here you are!" we cried. "What's happened to your famous backbone? You told us we weren't to show any interest in the bees and here you go and sneak off to look at them by yourself. Is that a comradely thing to do?"

Pavlik looked guilty.

"I . . . I just dropped in by chance," he said. "I was walking past, so I thought I'd come in."

"Rats!" we said. "You just wanted to have a look at the bees."

"Honest, I didn't. What do I want to look at them for?"

"But you did come to look at them, didn't you?"

"What about yourselves?"

"We also just dropped in by chance. We were passing by and saw you sitting here, so we came to look at you."

"That's not true. You just didn't have enough backbone to stick it out, that's all."

"You needn't talk. You came here before we did."

We argued about it for a long time. We were so hard at it that we didn't hear Yura coming up. He had overheard our talk and he said:



"None of you has any backbone."

"Why?"

"Because you started to work and dropped it. If you had any backbone you wouldn't have given up no matter how difficult it was."

"We didn't give up anything," said Pavlik. "We just wanted a little rest. We're quite ready to start working again now."

"That's fine," said Yura. "You go home and make yourselves nets and come and join us. But you'd better buzz off now or you'll get stung."

"We'll sit for a while and then we'll go," said Pavlik.

We sat down quietly near the hive and watched the bees crawling out one after the other and flying off for nectar. Some of the bees flew in, perched on the alighting-board and crawled inside. There were bees hovering around the hive all the time.

It was nice to see our hive alive with bees. We got quite a thrill watching them. After a while we went home and made ourselves nets out of wire and cheese-cloth. That kept us busy until evening. Our nets came out very well indeed. And we forgot all about being bored.

June 20

Today has been a wonderful day! Our whole group met in the school garden first thing in the morning. Everyone brought nets and Yura brought the smoke-pot. We began by testing the smoke-pot. We gathered pieces of dried wood and put them in the pot. Yura set them alight and blew on them. It worked beautifully.

Then we opened the hive and looked in. It was seething with bees! The frames were black with them. Some of them tried to come out when we opened the lid but Yura blew some smoke at them and they

crawled back. Then Tolya took out one of the frames and we had our first glimpse of a honeycomb. It is made of little six-sided compartments built closely together and called cells. The bees were so busy working at it that we put the frame back quickly so as not to disturb them.

Bees are wonderful insects. The honeycombs they make are so beautiful and neat that it is hard to believe they can have been built by such tiny creatures. Animals are clever too, take dogs, for instance. But even the cleverest dog couldn't make a honeycomb.

June 21

Today Galya brought her camera and took a snap-shot of our group beside the beehive. The boys stood in a row at the back of the hive but there was no room for Seryozha, Pavlik and me, so we sat in front. Galya told us all to stand still and then she clicked the camera and the picture was taken. Wonderful thing photography! Snap! And you are on the film. I once saw a film being developed. They put it into some liquid and they shake it and shake it and for a while nothing happens, then all of a sudden the picture appears. Only everything is the other way around because that's the way it comes out on the film, but when the picture is printed it comes straight again.

I wonder how our photo will come out. I'm afraid I'll come out with my eyes shut, because I blinked just when Galya clicked the camera. I've had that happen to me before. When we had our class photograph taken I blinked at the wrong moment and came out on the photo with my eyes closed as if I was sleeping on my feet. The boys didn't half rag me about it, they said I had spoiled the whole photograph. As if it was my fault!

June 22

The photo isn't ready yet. What a shame! Galya says the film hasn't dried yet. We asked her whether it had come out all right, but she wouldn't say.

"I'll print it tomorrow and then you'll see."

I am all excited. I do hope I won't come out blind like last time. What the dickens did I have to go and blink for just at the wrong moment!

Oh dear, I can hardly wait for tomorrow.

June 23

Galya brought the photo. Everyone came out fine except me—my mouth is wide open. I can't understand how it happened, because I don't remember opening my mouth at all. Everything else is all right, my eyes are open as they should be, but so is my mouth and that ought to have been shut. Of course I've had to listen to all sorts of nasty remarks from the fellows again:

"What did you have to go and gape for?"

"I didn't mean it."

"You ought to have stuck your tongue out while you were about it."

"It's none of your business what I look like. You came out all right, didn't you?"

"Yes, we're all right, but look at you!"

"What about me?"

"Sitting there gaping like a fish!"

I asked Galya whether she couldn't do something to cover up my mouth.

"But why?" she said. "I think you came out very well. It's a very good likeness."

"You mean to say I look like that? I'm supposed to be good-looking."

"So you are."

"Yes, but the photo makes me look silly."

"Nothing of the kind. Your mouth is slightly open because you are smiling, that's all. Nothing wrong with it. You don't look silly at all. On the contrary, you look very intelligent."

I am sure she was only trying to console me. But perhaps I really do look intelligent? I don't know. I only know that I always look funny on photographs. I don't know how it happens, because actually I am rather handsome, but you wouldn't think so by looking at my photo. Take this photo, for instance. I won't discuss my mouth, because that was my fault after all, but look at that nose. It's a regular pug nose, not a bit like mine. And the ears? Do my ears stick out like samovar handles? Well, I suppose it doesn't matter so much. There is *some* likeness. You can tell it's me, and not somebody else, so that's something. The main thing is the hive, with me and Seryozha and Pavlik sitting right in front. Very effective.

On the way home Seryozha said:

"Whatever made us push ourselves up to the front like that? Anyone would think we were the chief bee-keepers."

"Yes," said Pavlik, "it doesn't look very nice, especially after we dropped the whole thing and came in at the end. Everyone will think we're trying to take all the credit. They'll say we're conceited."

When I got home I thought about conceit. What makes people conceited? Some people, for instance, think they are wonderful and they're always boasting about themselves. But if you are really good, you don't need to talk about it, because anyone can see that you are

good, and if you aren't, no amount of bragging will help, because no one will believe you. Then there are people who imagine that they're handsome and they strut about giving themselves airs. But everyone can see whether a person is handsome or not, so why boast about it? Some folks think that they are very clever and they brag about it instead of leaving it to other people to judge whether they are clever or not. In my opinion it is very silly to be conceited. It's only silly people who think they're better than everybody else because clever people know that they aren't the only clever ones in the world.

June 24

Today Nina Sergeyevna told us how to water the bees.

You take a tank, fill it with water, place a board slantwise under the tap and let the water drip slowly down the board so the bees can drink without being washed away.

We didn't know where to get a tank, but Grisha said there was an old barrel standing in his attic, so we went to his place and his mother said we could take the barrel. It was awfully heavy and we had a hard time hauling it down from the attic. As we were rolling it along the street we met Fedya.

"Where the dickens are you going with that? To the brewery?"

"No, to the apiary. It's to water the bees with."

"You're crazy! What do they need all that water for?"

"That's all right," said Yura. "They'll drink it up."

We rolled the barrel into the school garden and got busy filling it with water. But the barrel was so dry that the water poured out of it like from a sieve. We thought we would have to take it back again, but Galya said that when it got properly soaked with water the staves would swell and it would stop leaking.

So we went on hauling water. We must have poured a couple of hundred pails into that barrel before it finally stopped leaking. Gradually it swelled and by evening we had it half full of water.

Tomorrow we'll fill it up.

June 25

The barrel soaked through during the night and by morning it had stopped leaking altogether. We had just filled it to the brim when we realized that it ought to be standing off the ground so the water could drip on to the board. So we had to empty out all the water, stand the barrel on a small platform and fill it up again. Then we plugged up the opening, leaving a tiny hole for the water to drip from. Finally it was ready and soon a bee settled on the board and started poking at the wet board with its proboscis. In a little while other bees came over to drink and we felt that our labour had been rewarded.

After that we had a Pioneer meeting and Galya told the others what our group had been doing. Everybody was very interested and the boys from Group Two wanted to drop their work on the plot and join us.

"No," said Galya, "that won't do. Who will work on the experimental plot if you all take up bee-keeping?"



"We won't give up our work, we'll just come and look at the bees when we have time," they said.

"That's another matter," said Galya. "You are welcome to come whenever you like so long as you don't neglect your own work. The garden is important too, you know."

June 26

Today we watched where the bees go for nectar and we found that they don't go any further than our experimental plot. The cucumbers, marrows and pumpkins are in bloom and all the rows are covered with little yellow flowers. We watched the bees flying from flower to flower, crawling right inside the little flower-cups close to the ground.

One bee crawled into a pumpkin flower and came out covered all over with yellow pollen. We noticed that some of the bees flew somewhere across the street but we couldn't follow them because they flew too high. They go to the park most likely.

June 27

Yura brought some honey in a glass to feed the bees with. He spread a little on a piece of glass and laid it down not far from the hive. The bees flew past without paying any attention to the treat we had prepared for them. Zhenya caught one bee by placing a tumbler over it and dropped it right on the honey. The bee began eating the honey at once. We watched to see what it would do. After it had eaten for some time it flew back into the hive. Soon another one came out of the hive and flew over to the honey and began eating. Then it too flew away and in a minute or two another bee came straight over to the

honey just as if it had known that the honey was there. We were astonished: how could they know about the honey?

"Zhenya's bee must have told them," I said.

The others laughed at me. "Bees can't talk to each other," they said.

"But how did the other bee know there was honey here?"

"Perhaps it just happened to notice it while flying past."

When it had flown away, Fedya said: "Let's hide the honey and see what happens."

We took the piece of glass with the honey away. In a few minutes we saw a bee come out of the hive and make straight for the place where the honey had been. It hovered there buzzing angrily. It was quite plain that the bee knew the honey had been there. So someone *had* told it. It hovered there for a long time, so we put the honey back and it flew straight at it, ate some and flew away. We tried shifting the honey a little further away from the first place. Pretty soon a bee came out of the hive and flew to the old place. It seemed surprised to find the honey gone and it buzzed around until it found the honey. But the next bee went straight to the new place.

I was delighted.

"You see!" I said. "That means someone told it the honey had been moved."

We watched the bees all day long. Each time we moved the honey the bees flew first to where it had been before and then began looking for it. It was easy to see that they had some way of talking to one another.

But how do they talk? I have been thinking about this ever since I got home. If they can talk they must have tongues. But how can we find out whether they really do have tongues? They are such tiny things. And if they can talk that means they must have ears as well. Tomorrow I am going to see whether they have ears or not.

June 28

Bees don't have ears. I examined one of them very closely but I didn't see any sign of ears. In fact, I don't think they hear at all. I tried shouting at them but they didn't pay the slightest attention.

Nina Sergeyeвна came to look at our hive today and we told her about our experiment. She asked us to demonstrate for her, so we caught a bee and put it on the glass with the honey. The bee ate the honey and flew back to the hive and a few minutes later a bee came out of the hive and flew straight over to the honey.

"See that!" we cried. "That means the first bee told it about the honey."

"Let us try marking this bee," said Nina Sergeyeвна.

She explained that you can mark bees by dabbing a little paint on their backs. Tolya ran home and fetched his paint-box, and as soon as the bee settled on the honey he quickly put a dab of white paint on its back. The bee was so busy eating that it didn't notice anything. It didn't fly away until it had filled itself with honey. We

waited a few minutes and what do we see but the same bee coming out of the hive and making straight for the honey. We watched it eat some more honey and fly back to the hive. In a little while it was back again. We were amazed.

"What a greedy bee!" I said. "She will burst if she's not careful."



But Nina Sergeyevna told us the bee wasn't eating at all. It had taken as much honey as it could carry back to the hive for the honeycomb. All bees do that. Whenever they find nectar they take it at once to the hive.

The bee with the white mark on it came back again and again and we saw that what we had thought were several bees had actually been only one bee.

"Then they don't talk to one another after all?"

"They don't talk like people, of course," said Nina Sergeyevna. "But they do have some way of communicating with one another. They have their own language. If you observe them carefully you may be able to find out how they do it."

June 29

Today we tried another experiment to see whether a bee could find its way back home if we took it a long way from the hive.

I caught one of the bees with a tumbler so it wouldn't escape and took it home. I told the boys I would mark it and let it fly from my balcony.

The boys waited behind to see whether the marked bee would come back. On my way home I held the glass up to let the bee see where we were going. But I made sure to keep the tumbler covered so it wouldn't fly away.

To make sure that the bee wouldn't fly away before I got it marked, I put a saucer of honey on the balcony and set the tumbler with the bee on it. When the bee settled on the honey I carefully took off the tumbler and put a dab of paint on its back. It went on calmly eating the honey. After a while it flew away and I hurried back to school. On the way I met Seryozha.

"She came back!" he cried. "She's there already!"

We jumped with joy right in the middle of the street. What a clever bee! Imagine a tiny little thing like that finding its way over such a distance!

"Give me the tumbler, we'll experiment with another bee."

But I had left the tumbler at home. We ran back to my house. I was just going to take the saucer with the honey off the balcony when a bee came and settled on the honey and started eating. We examined it and saw that it had a dab of paint on its back.

"Why, it's the same bee! It came back for more honey."

"Some bee!" said Seryozha. "Found its way home and came all the way back for more honey."

"Let's wait a bit. Maybe it will come back again," I suggested.

We waited, and in about ten minutes the bee came back. It came twenty times before the afternoon was over. Wonderful insect! If it was a fly it would have filled itself up with honey and flown away, but the bee didn't only think of itself, it carried home honey for the other bees in the hive. Some people could take an example from bees.

June 30

There was one thing that puzzled us: why was it that when you put a bee on some honey a long way from the hive it remembered the place and came back for more, but if you put some honey close to the hive the bees would fly past without seeing it.

Nina Sergeyevna told us to try another experiment.

"Take two bits of glass and put some honey on each of them. Put one piece on the ground and lay the other on a piece of coloured paper and see where the bees alight first."

We did as she said. We put one bit of glass with honey right on the grass and laid the other on a piece of light-blue paper. At first

the bees flew past both of them without noticing the honey. But after a while one bee settled on the glass that lay on the blue paper. We marked that bee, and in a little while it came back, and presently another, unmarked bee came and settled on the same place. We marked that one too. In a couple of hours five bees had come to the honey on the blue paper and not one had settled on the other piece of glass.

"It must be the colour that attracts them," said Vitya.

"That's right," said Nina Sergeyevna. "Now you know why flowers have such bright colours. It is to attract bees and other insects."

"But why should the flowers want to attract bees?" I asked.

"Because the bees help with pollination. The more bees and other insects settle on the flowers the better they are pollinated and the more seed they produce."

Nina Sergeyevna told us that not all plants are pollinated by insects. Some plants, like rye, for instance, depend on the wind for pollination. Rye flowers are so small that bees and other insects do not notice them.

How wonderful nature is! I used to wonder why flowers were so beautiful, and now it turns out that there is a good reason for it. Plants that are pollinated by insects have lovely big flowers so that the insects can find them easily and help to scatter the pollen. That means that beautiful flowers are not only nice to look at but useful too.

July 1

We are still experimenting with our bees. Today we took two pieces of paper, red and blue, dropped some honey on them and put a bee on the blue paper. The bee began carrying the honey back to the hive from the blue paper. It kept returning to the blue paper and paid no attention to the red paper lying beside it although there was

honey on that as well. After a while we switched the papers. The bee flew back to where the blue paper had been, but when it saw the red paper there it did not settle but buzzed around and around until it found the blue paper. Then we moved the blue paper a little farther away, but the bee searched for it and found it.

We experimented with other colours and found that the bee always flies back to the colour on which it found the honey. That means that bees can not only tell colours apart, but they remember them as well. That is why they can always return to the flowers that give the most honey.

Tomorrow Grisha and Fedya are going off to a Pioneer camp. They said good-bye to us today and said they won't be coming to the hive any more. Fedya said he was sorry to have to part with the bees even to go to summer camp. But we told him not to worry, we would take good care of the bees.

July 2

The more we observe the bees the more we marvel at them. Bees aren't very different from flies to look at, but actually they're not at all alike. Flies are silly good-for-nothings. All they do is buzz and crawl about where they're not wanted, annoying people and spreading all kinds of diseases besides. But bees are always doing something useful. They work together with the other bees, each one working not for itself but for the whole community. And what wonderful things they do! Today we came to the hive and what do you think we found? Several bees were sitting at the entrance with their wings whirring like little engines. At first we thought they had got stuck to the board and couldn't fly. We drove them off but they flew back and started whirring their wings again. We ran to Nina Sergeyevna and asked her what it could mean.

"They're ventilating the hive," she said. "It is a very hot day and the hive gets stuffy in hot weather, so they are cooling it." Didn't I say they were wonderful! They even have their own ventilation system.

Another exciting thing happened today. My mother and dad came and visited our hive.

July 3

Another hot day. The bees spent most of the day ventilating the hive and flying back and forth between the water barrel and the hive. There seemed to be two long lines of them in the air, one going from the hive to the barrel, the other from the barrel to the hive.

We couldn't make out why they went back to the hive after they had drunk. Nina Sergeyevna told us to mark the bees that came for water. Tolya marked them and we soon noticed that the same bees came for water all the time.

"It's a sort of water team!" cried Fedya. "They must be carrying water back to the hive."

"That's it," said Nina Sergeyevna. "In hot weather some of the bees always carry water to the hive for those who are working inside."

"But can't they come for water themselves?" I asked.

Nina Sergeyevna explained that labour in a beehive is strictly divided. The young bees who haven't yet learned to go out in search of nectar work inside the hive, building the comb, keeping the hive clean, ventilating it and feeding the baby-bees. It's the older bees who go out for honey and carry water to the hive in hot weather.

"What a pity we can't see them working inside," said Zhenya.

Nina Sergeyevna said there are glass hives through which you can observe the bees inside the hive.

We shall have a hive like that some day.

July 4

Today Nina Sergeyevna said that the lime-tree will soon be blossoming and we must prepare for the main take.

"What is that?" we asked.

"That's the time when a great many flowers blossom at once—clover, buckwheat, acacia, maple or willows—and when the bees lay up the main stores of honey."

"But we haven't any clover or buckwheat."

"But we have lime-trees. Our bees will get their main store from there."

Nina Sergeyevna showed us how to make an extension to the hive, a sort of storehouse with extra frames for the big honey supply. Then she told us to watch for the lime-trees in flower, and as soon as the first blossoms appeared to add the extra frames.

July 5

The lime-trees haven't blossomed yet. I climbed up one myself to make sure, but the buds hadn't opened.

Galya saw me up the tree.

"What are you doing up there? Get down at once!"

"I was checking up on the blossoms."

"You don't need to climb the tree for that. You will see the flowers when they open."

But I am glad I made sure. It would be too bad if we missed it.

July 6

I have noticed that there are always two or three bees at the entrance of the hive. The others fly in and out, but these bees stay in one place and don't fly anywhere. I wondered what they could be doing there. Today I found out.

A bumble-bee tried to get into the hive. He buzzed round and round the hive, looking for some way of getting in and gorging himself on honey. When he didn't find any hole he tried going through the entrance but the bees at the opening pounced on him and drove him away.

He flew off as quickly as he could but they caught up with him and stung him. Serves him right for trying to steal the honey. The bees didn't work hard gathering the honey so some lazy old bumble-bee could come and gobble it up. He didn't gather any honey, so he has no right to eat it.

I guessed that those bees at the entrance to the hive were probably sentries who guard the hive from thieves like the bumble-bee. I asked Nina Sergeyevna and she said I was right.

So I am not so thick-headed after all.

Nina Sergeyevna told us that bees often die, defending their hive. If some big beast, a bear for instance, invades the hive, the whole bee swarm attacks and stings the invader. But they all die, because bees can't live without their stings. So you see how brave they are.

July 7

We have made an important contribution to science: today Zhenya Shemyakin invented a way of seeing inside the hive. He directed a sunbeam into the hive with a mirror so that it lit up the interior. Of

course only one of us could look in at a time, so we all took turns. I thought my turn would never come. Vitya Almazov who was in front of me took such a long time that I lost patience. Every time I tried to hurry him up he said: "Wait a minute!" I must have waited a whole hour before he finally gave me the mirror, but by that time the sun had moved away and I couldn't see anything. I was furious.

"What did you give me the mirror for when the sun has gone?"

"Is it my fault the sun has gone?"

The mean selfish beast! Tomorrow I'll get a mirror and go to the hive before any of the others and look as much as I wish.

At home I read an item in the paper about honey. It turns out that honey is used as a medicine. People with stomach trouble, weak hearts, lungs or nerves, or some other complaint must eat honey and they will get well very quickly. And if you have a boil or an abscess you only have to smear a little honey on it and bind it up with a cloth and it will soon disappear.

July 8

I got up early and went to the hive with a mirror but there was no sun. It was cloudy all day. Just my luck!

We had a Pioneer meeting again and all the groups reported on their work. We told about our experiments, and Shura, who leads Group Two, reported about their work on the experimental plot. He said they expected a big cucumber crop, much bigger than last year. There is a simple explanation for that: last year we didn't keep bees, this year our bees helped pollinate the cucumbers.

July 9

At last the sun came out. I put on my net, pulled on a pair of mittens so the bees wouldn't sting me and sat down beside the hive with my mirror. What a thrilling sight it was! The honeycombs were swarming with bees; they were crawling in a black mass back and forth over the combs, crawling inside the cells and crawling out again. It must have been hot inside the hive because I saw the bees working with their wings like the ones we had seen at the entrance. Each little bee looked like a tiny ventilation fan. I was dying to see the baby-bees but I couldn't see any sign of them. Later on I asked Nina Sergeyevna why there weren't any baby-bees in our hive.

"What do you think baby-bees look like?" she asked me.

"I thought they would be little bees," I said.

Nina Sergeyevna laughed. "No," she said. "They aren't like that. Tomorrow we'll open the hive and I shall show you what they look like."

I told all the others to be sure and come tomorrow to see the baby-bees.

July 10

This morning our whole group met at the hive. Soon Nina Sergeyevna came. She told us how the bees breed their young. It turns out that not all the wax cells the bees make are for storing the honey, some of them are used for breeding the young. Every bee family has a queen bee who does nothing but lay the eggs. The other bees can't lay eggs, they can only work, and that is why they are called workers. The queen bee lays about two thousand eggs in a day. She lays them in the empty wax cells which are like very small nests—one egg to each cell.

Nina Sergeyevna told us to open the hive and take out one of the frames. At first we thought the combs were empty, but Nina Sergeyevna told us that if we looked closely we would see the eggs. And sure enough, we looked and saw a tiny little egg, no bigger than a poppy seed, lying at the bottom of every cell. Only poppy seeds are black and the eggs are white.

We couldn't imagine how bees could ever come out of such tiny eggs, but Nina Sergeyevna said that it is not bees that come out of the eggs but larvae, which are like tiny little worms or caterpillars. Nina Sergeyevna examined the honeycomb and found some cells with larvae. Some of them were very small, others a little bigger. They were curled up at the bottom of the cells.

"These larvae are the bees' children," said Nina Sergeyevna. We were very surprised to hear that.

"But how can these worms grow up to be bees? They'll be worms or caterpillars, won't they?"

"No, the larva develops into pupa, and after a few days a full-grown bee emerges from the pupa."

Nina Sergeyevna also told us that besides workers the bees rear young queen bees and drones. They make specially large cells for the young queens, and just before a young queen emerges from the pupa, part of the bees fly away from the hive with the old queen and form a swarm of their own. If the swarm is placed in some other hive you will have a new bee family. The drones are a little larger than the workers. The workers are the females, and the drones are the males. The drones don't gather honey, but they have terrific appetites. When winter comes the bees drive all the drones out of the hive so that they won't devour all the stores of honey.

I thought a lot about bees after what Nina Sergeyevna had told us. At first I thought that bees must be rather like birds, because birds

also have wings and lay eggs. But then I remembered that when the bird sits on her eggs she hatches out fledglings, but bees don't sit on their eggs and the eggs turn into larvae. So bees aren't really like birds. No, bees are more like butterflies. Butterflies also have wings and they also lay eggs which turn into caterpillars and the caterpillar turns into a chrysalis and the chrysalis turns into a butterfly. I know that because last summer I had a large furry caterpillar in a box which turned into a chrysalis. It lay in the box for a long time until one fine day out came a beautiful butterfly. So perhaps bees are really little butterflies.

July 11

It was lovely and sunny today. I came to the hive in the morning to find Tolya sitting with his mirror peering into the upper opening and chuckling to himself.

"What's the joke?" I asked him.

"They're dancing."

"Who's dancing?"

"The bees!"

"You're crazy!"

"All right, take a look yourself."

I took the mirror from him and peeped inside.

I saw a bee hopping about on the comb. I saw it turn from side to side and spin around quickly. Suddenly another bee ran after it and they started spinning together. Then a third joined in. They looked so funny I couldn't help laughing.

"They've been at it for quite a long time," said Tolya. "I've been watching them."

I looked into the lower entrance and down on the floor of the hive I saw a whole crowd of bees dancing in a ring. One of them was lead-

ing the dance and the others followed it, imitating all its movements. The leader whirled round and round and the others did the same. Then the leader flew over to another place and began dancing there, and gradually the others joined it and they all danced together again.

When the other boys came up we showed them the bees dancing.

"What the dickens does that mean?" said Vitya. "Perhaps it is some sort of bees' holiday?"

We all laughed at the idea of bees having holidays.

We ran to Nina Sergeyevna and asked her why the bees were dancing and she told us that whenever a bee finds a place where there are a great many flowers it comes back to the hive and dances. That is its way of letting the other bees know where to go for nectar. The others swarm around it and smell it and they can tell by the scent what flowers it gathered the nectar from. After that the bees fly out to where the flowers are.

"You will find that the bees dance mostly at the time of the main take," said Nina Sergeyevna. "I think you ought to see whether the lime-trees are in bloom."

We hurried over to the school. There were several large old lime-trees in the garden. We looked up and saw that the little pale-yellow flowers had opened and the bees were already swarming over them. We ran back to our hive and put on the extension. Our bees went on dancing inside the hive until evening. One bee even danced out on to the alighting-board and then flew off.

I thought a lot about the bees when I got home this evening. So that is how the bees talk to each other! When they want to tell one another where to go for nectar they dance. Of course they cannot speak to one another, but they can find the way by the scent. That means that their sense of smell is very highly developed, much

better than ours. There is nothing really surprising about that, because dogs also have a better sense of smell than human beings. But then dogs are so much bigger than bees.

Then I thought about flowers. Why do they smell so nice? Just to give pleasure to human beings? No, the scent of flowers, like their colour, must be meant to attract the bees and help pollination. The more bees and other insects settle on plants the better for the plants. And here's another thing: why do flowers have nectar? Isn't that also to attract insects? I shall ask Nina Sergeyevna tomorrow.

July 12

I asked Nina Sergeyevna and she said I was right.

I'm getting quite clever, it seems. It's thinking that does it. From now on I'm always going to think about all sorts of things. It broadens your mind.

Our bees were terribly busy all day today. They filled the air with a constant hum like the hum at the textile mill where Galya took us last month. The bees rush in and out of the hive, they seem to be in a hurry to stock up as much nectar as they can while the lime-tree is in bloom. The alighting-board has been jammed all day with bees hurrying out of the hive to fly off for nectar and bees hurrying back with their load. And the trees are simply swarming with them. You can hardly see the flowers for the bees. There are thousands of them. We never thought we had so many bees.

Nina Sergeyevna says that during the main-take season there can be as many as eighty thousand workers in the hive, and some very big families have as many as one hundred thousand.

One hundred thousand! Just think of it. Like the population of a town. But come to think of it, a hive is a bee town.

July 13

Work is humming! The bees buzz back and forth like squadrons of airplanes. The alighting-board is still crowded and inside the hive there was dancing again today. It really does look like a holiday. Perhaps the honey-gathering season is a holiday for the bees? After all, they must be very happy to be gathering so much nectar. They will have plenty laid aside for the winter.

July 14

How exciting! We've got into the newspapers! When we came to the school garden this morning Vitya came running up with a newspaper in his hand.

"Look at this, boys!" he yelled. "We're in the paper!"

We looked at the paper and there was the photograph Galya had taken of us beside the hive and an item about us, describing how we had made our own hive and started bee-keeping. All our names were there too and the address of our school.

We hurried to the nearest news-stand and bought newspapers. Pavlik and I bought two each. We tried to guess who it was that had written about us.

"It must be Galya," said Yura. "She took that photo. She must have sent the photo and the item to the paper."

We ran to Galya and asked her if it was she who had written the item and she said it was. We thanked her.

"You needn't thank me," she said. "You made the hive and did all the work yourselves, so you can thank yourselves."

We ran home to show the paper to our folks. Seryozha and Pavlik and I were on our way home when Pavlik said:

"We have nothing to thank ourselves for."

"Yes, if it was left to us there wouldn't be any hive," agreed Seryozha. "We ought to thank the others for carrying on when we gave up."

"We got into the newspaper under false pretences, so we've nothing to boast about."

"Yes," said Pavlik, "people will read our names in the paper and say: 'What fine boys!' If they only knew."

"I shan't show the newspaper to anyone," said Seryozha.

"Neither shall I," said Pavlik.

I don't know about them, but I showed the paper to everybody. I showed it to Mother and Dad and Uncle Vasya and Aunt Nadya, and to all the neighbours as well. Everybody praised me and made such a fuss of me I began to feel uncomfortable. My conscience began bothering me, and that started me thinking about conscience and what it is and why it bothers you. Why is it that when you are good your conscience doesn't give you the slightest twinge, but when you do something mean or bad it pricks you like anything.

I think that conscience is a little man who lives inside of me, a very good little man who wants me to be good too and who makes me feel miserable when I am bad. But I know that's only my notion, and there really isn't anyone inside of me except myself. So it's I who reproach myself, and my conscience is me.



Why do I reproach myself now? For having boasted to the neighbours, for making them think I'm somebody of importance when actually I haven't done anything worth talking about. Next time I shan't boast if I have nothing to boast about.

July 15

The news of our hive has spread all over the school and today we were visited by pupils from lower forms and some from the senior forms too. We showed them our hive and told them all we had learned about bee-keeping. They said they would come and learn bee-keeping from us.

Later on a man came, a stranger.

"Are you the boys the paper wrote about?" he asked.

"That's us."

"And this is your beehive, I suppose? May I have a look at it?"

"Of course."

He squatted down beside the hive and sat watching the bees for a long time. Finally he got up and said:

"Remarkable! I'd never have believed it!" And he went away.

There! Even grown-ups are beginning to take an interest in our work. And all because of that item in the newspaper. If it wasn't for that nobody would have heard about us at all.

July 16

Today two boys from another school came to see us. They also read about us in the paper and came purposely to see our hive. They want to make one too. When they had gone, the man who came yesterday turned up again. He stayed and talked with us for a long time, but then a bee stung him and he went away.

July 17

We are getting quite famous! Today Galya came to us and said there was a letter for us.

We were very much surprised. Who could have written to us? We ran inside and got the letter. Here it is (I brought it home to copy into my diary). It is from the pupils of a cabinet-makers school.

“Dear young bee-keepers! We read about you in the newspaper and would like to correspond with you. We are very much interested in what you are doing and now we want to follow your example and take up bee-keeping. We would be very grateful if you would give us the measurements of the hive and, if possible, send us the drawings. We are learning to make furniture. We already know how to make stools, tables and benches and next year we are going over to bent-wood furniture. So we ought to be able to make a good hive and perhaps later on we can make hives for other boys who go in for bee-keeping. Please let us know where to get bees. We are looking forward to your reply. We send you warmest greetings and best wishes for further success.”

We had a Pioneer meeting today and Galya read the letter out and we decided to answer it at once. We wrote them a long letter, giving them all the instructions, enclosing drawings of the hive and the address of the apiary which sent us our bees.

July 18

We received another letter today. It is from a little boy named Mitya Romashkin. A very decent letter for a little boy. We liked it very much. Here it is:

“Dear friends! I am a bee-keeper too. Ever since last year I have been trying to keep bees in a box, but I can’t get them to stay there.

They keep flying away. I put honey and sugar in the box, but they eat the honey and fly away. Yesterday I caught another ten bees but now they've gone too. I want ever so much to collect a lot of bees so that when I grow up I can have a hive or even two hives and become a bee-keeper. Please tell me how I can keep the bees from flying away from me, because they simply won't stay no matter what I do. Also tell me do the bees sting you, because they sting me something awful, but I try to bear it bravely like the soldiers at the front. Please write and tell me what to do. Your friend, Mitya Romashkin."

We had a good laugh over Mitya's letter until we remembered that we had also tried catching bees one by one. So we stopped laughing and wrote a long letter to Mitya, telling him all we knew about bees. It took us quite a long time to write the letter. After that we went to our hive.

July 19

We get letters every day now. Today one came addressed to me personally: "Kolya Sinitsin, the famous bee-keeper," it said on the envelope. I was terribly thrilled. My hands shook with excitement when I opened it.

"Dear unknown friend Kolya Sinitsin!" it began. "You will probably be surprised to get a letter from a girl you have never seen before and whom you might not even want to know now that you are such a famous person with your name in the newspapers and everything. I also read about you in the newspaper which printed your photograph and a description of the work done by your Pioneer group. We read the item at a Pioneer meeting and resolved to follow your example and go in for bee-keeping too.

"You may smile when you read this because some boys look down on girls and imagine that they are no good for anything. But we have

decided to show that girls are just as good as boys and we are going to take up bee-keeping. A knowledge of bees may come in handy for many of us when we grow up and go to work in the collective-farm apiary.

"The Pioneer group elected me to write and ask you to tell us how you made your hive and how to take care of bees. But I thought I would write a personal letter to you because I like your name and I believe that you must be a very nice boy and that you will not refuse to help us. That will be all for now. With Pioneer greetings. Lusya Abanova."

I did not much like the idea of writing to this girl Lusya at first, but the others said I should. Galya said I must write at once and tell Lusya and her friends all they wanted to know. If the girls wished to keep bees it was our duty to help them.

So I went home and sat down to write a letter. I laboured over it for a whole hour, trying very hard to write neatly and not make any mistakes, so that the girl wouldn't be able to find any fault with it. When I finished I read it over and it sounded very nice to me. Very nice indeed. I read it to the boys and they said no one would be ashamed to send a letter like that.

July 20

Today we had more visitors, boys mostly, but also that man who came before and who got stung last time. We were afraid he would get stung again, so we gave him a net to put on his head. When Nina Sergeyevna came he began asking her all sorts of questions.

"Excuse me," he said, "but is this hive intended only for study purposes or has it some practical use besides?"

"Both," answered Nina Sergeyevna.

"Now what practical use can it have? Is it really possible to keep bees in town?"

"Of course it is. The bees can get all the nectar they want from the blossoms of maples, lime-trees, acacias, willows, bird-cherries and various other trees and bushes that grow in the parks, gardens and boulevards. Besides, bees often go a long way for nectar, they can fly out to the suburbs and gather honey in the fields outside of town. It is an old-fashioned notion that bees can only be kept in the country. In modern cities like Moscow it is quite possible to keep bees."

"In that case I shall begin at once," said the man. "The trouble is I don't know where to put the hive."

"Oh, bees are not so fussy as you might think," said Nina Sergeyevna. "You can put your hive in your back yard, on your balcony, in your attic or even in a shed."

"Bees on the balcony, eh? That's an idea!" said the man. "There now, who would have thought it? What progress science is making!"

He thanked Nina Sergeyevna, shook hands with her, promised to come again to study our bees if we didn't mind, and walked off with the net still on his head. We had to run after him to get it back.

July 21

It was very hot today and the bees did not do much work. They hung close together at the entrance, spilling out on to the alighting-board in a solid mass, like a black beard. The "beard" hung there for a long time and then the bees crawled back into the hive. After a while they came out again, still sticking close together, and hung for some time. Finally they went back into the hive and stayed there.

July 22

When Seryozha and Pavlik and I came to the hive this morning we found the bees crowding together again at the entrance. We thought they were going to form a "beard" again, but suddenly they all flew up in a mass and started circling over the hive, buzzing loudly. Soon other bees joined them until it began to look like a regular stampede. We got frightened and hid behind a tree, watching the bees fly round and round the garden. They made such a noise you could have heard them a mile away.

"What's the matter with them?" said Pavlik.

"I know!" cried Seryozha. "It's a swarm."

"So it is! Where are we going to put them?"

"We need a pail," I suggested.

"Yes, you two run home for one and I'll stay here and see what happens," said Pavlik.

Seryozha and I raced down the street. I hunted all over the house for a pail but I couldn't find a spare one, so I snatched up the large cardboard box the radio set had been packed in and dashed out again. When I got back to the school yard I found Seryozha racing up and down the garden with a pail, but there was no sign of Pavlik.

"Where's Pavlik?" I asked.

"Dunno. I've hunted all over for him, but I can't find him."

"Where's the swarm?"

"The swarm's gone too."

We stopped and looked around us. Just then Pavlik's head popped up from behind the fence.

"What are you standing there for? Come here quick!"



We climbed over the fence into the next yard. Seryozha caught his foot on the fence going over and dropped the pail. It fell with a loud clatter on the other side.

"Keep quiet, can't you!" hissed Pavlik. "You'll frighten the swarm!"

"Where is it?"

"Look!" He pointed to a tree near the fence. The swarm was hanging from a branch of the tree in a tight bunch except for a few bees which buzzed around the swarm as if trying to find a place to attach themselves to.

"Give me the pail," said Pavlik.

"Perhaps this box will be better?" I suggested. "It's bigger!"

"All right, let me have it."

I tiptoed up to the swarm and stood the box under it. Pavlik shook the branch and the swarm dropped into the box. I quickly put the lid on.

"There," I said. "Now they won't fly away."

We climbed back over the fence and found the other boys standing around the hive.

"Come and look!" I shouted. "We've got a swarm!"

"Where?"

"Here in the box."

"Where did you get it?"

"It flew out of the hive."

I lifted the lid a little and showed them the bees inside.

"Isn't that wonderful!" they said. "Now we'll have a brand-new bee family. We'll have to get busy and make another hive straight-away."

We got our tools and set to work at once. Nina Sergeyevna came and we showed her the swarm in the box.

"They chose the wrong time to leave the hive," she said.

"Why?"

"Because this is the honey season, and when the bees swarm they gather very little nectar."

"That's all right," we said. "We don't need much honey. We'd rather have more bees."

By evening the hive was ready. We made several new frames for it and took one frame with larvae and another with honey from the old hive so that the new family should feel at home in the new hive. Then we shook the swarm out of the box into the hive, covered it up and went home.

Seryozha, Pavlik and I are very pleased with ourselves because if it hadn't been for us the swarm would have got away. So we aren't altogether useless.

July 23

Yesterday Nina Sergeyevna told us to keep a close watch over the new swarm because the bees do not always take to their new quarters and are apt to fly away to look for some other home. We came specially early in the morning to watch. For a long time nothing happened and then at last a bee flew out of the new hive, turned facing the entrance as if taking note of the place, then circled over the hive and flew off. Soon other bees appeared and they too flew round the hive several times before flying away. We were afraid they wouldn't find the way back to their new home and would fly into the old hive by mistake, but after a while they came back and went straight into the new hive. We jumped for joy—we were so glad that they liked the new home we made for them.

July 24

We spent all morning watching our bees. Both hives are hard at work, but the bees in the new hive seem to be more energetic. They don't waste a single moment—as soon as they come out of the hive they spread their little wings and off they go for nectar. Nina Sergeyevna said that the swarm always works harder in a new hive because the bees have little time left to store up a supply of honey for the winter.

July 25

It is very windy today and the sky is overcast. The sun peeps out now and again and then hides behind the clouds. It has rained several times. The bees in the old hive are staying indoors, but in the new hive work goes on as usual. As soon as the sun appears the bees fly out at once. It is a pleasure to watch them.

Fedya and Grisha have come back from summer camp. How quickly the time has passed! You can imagine how surprised they were to find two hives instead of one. They thought we had ordered another swarm and were amazed when we told them that the new swarm came from the old hive. Then we showed them the item in the newspaper with our photograph and all the letters we had received. They were quite impressed.

“You’ve done wonders here while we’ve been away!” they said.

July 26

The weather is very bad. It has rained nearly all day and both hives are quiet. We felt so dull without the bees that Galya proposed that we go to the pictures, and after dinner she bought tickets for the whole group and we went and saw a jolly picture.

July 27

The main honey season is over. The lime-tree blossoms have faded and now the bees will have to hunt for nectar somewhere else. We were afraid that our new bee family would be left without honey for the winter, but Nina Sergeyevna said that we could spare some from the other hive. We took stock of our honey supply and found that there would be enough for both swarms.

“But there won’t be any honey for you this year,” she said.

“We don’t want any honey,” we said. “We’d rather the bees had it. After all they worked for it, so it really belongs to them.”

“That’s right,” said Nina Sergeyevna. “That will give both swarms enough to winter on and next year they will gather so much that there will be plenty to spare for you.”

"How lovely it will be to taste our own honey!" said Pavlik.

"But where will our bees spend the winter? Will we have to make a winter hive for them?" Yura asked.

"One or two hives can winter in any ordinary house cellar provided it is dry, or in a dug-out cellar."

We decided to make a dug-out cellar and to begin work tomorrow so as to provide our bees with a nice warm home for the winter in good time.

July 28

We met first thing in the morning and set to work to dig a large hole at the bottom of the garden. We are going to cover the hole with planks, with a layer of earth on top to keep out the cold.

The ground is very hard and it was pretty hot work digging. But we kept it up all day until we had a nice big hole dug. Yura proposed that we make a bonfire at the bottom to dry the walls properly so it wouldn't be damp. We brought dry kindling and lit a big bonfire and picked up all the brushwood we could find to keep the fire going. It was evening by the time we had the fire started, and before long it was quite dark. When the fire burned itself out we cleaned out the ashes and sat there to rest after our hard day's work. It was nice and cosy sitting there in the hole looking up at the stars twinkling in the dark sky and listening to the wind whispering in the trees.

"I'll miss the bees an awful lot in winter," said Grisha. "I've got used to them, they're such jolly little things and such clever workers."

"I'll miss them too," said Fedya.

"Well, it's a long time till winter," Tolya consoled them. "Besides, in winter we'll be too busy at school to think about bees."

"That old bee-keeper was right," said Pavlik. "He said that once

you start keeping bees you'll never want to give it up. I've made up my mind to be a bee-keeper too when I grow up. I'll be a bee-keeper at a collective farm. I'll have lots of hives, a hundred or two hundred. Two hundred most likely."

"It's all right for you," said Fedya. "But what about me? I'm going to be an engineer and build bridges and tunnels and canals. . . ."

"That doesn't matter," I said. "You can be an engineer and keep bees too. They won't prevent you from building bridges."

"Of course not," said Vitya. "I'm going to be a painter but I'll keep bees as well. Can't a person have two specialities?"

"If he's an artist, maybe he can," said Zhenya. "But I'm going to be a flyer."

"Well, what of it? You won't be flying all the time," I said.

"But suppose I have to go on a long-distance flight?"

"The bees will live without you. They don't need a nurse, they can look after themselves."

"Yes, it isn't so bad for a flyer," said Yura. "But I want to be a sailor or a captain, and ocean voyages sometimes take a whole year! What will happen to my bees then?"

"You can take your bees on board with you," I said. "You only have to close the entrance of the hive while you're at sea, and when you put in at some port you can let the bees out to feed on shore and they'll come back again. I think it would be fun to have a beehive on board ship."

I proved to all of them that anyone can keep bees if they want to—flyers, engine-drivers, miners, builders, anyone. When I went home I got to thinking what I would do myself about bee-keeping, because I have decided to work in the Arctic when I grow up and I don't think bees would be very comfortable in the Arctic. There aren't any flowers or trees up there, only ice and polar bears. Then I thought that per-

haps by the time I grew up people would have started growing trees and flowers in the Arctic, so I could keep bees just as well up there as anywhere else. And if they hadn't, I would plant them myself, and in the meantime I would feed my bees with syrup.

So it's settled: I am going to have bees in the Arctic.

July 29

We didn't think we would get any more letters but today another one came. We had all turned up at the apiary this morning, when Yura Kuskov came running up, waving a letter. He had dropped into the school office on his way to the apiary and found this letter waiting for us. We tore open the envelope and read the letter aloud.

"Dear friends! We, Pioneers from the Lenin's Path collective farm, read all about you in the newspapers and decided to write to you and tell you how ashamed we were to think that we, collective-farm Pioneers, had not yet built an apiary of our own while you city boys have your own bees. We decided to remedy our mistake at once and have already taken up the matter with our farm board and have been given two hives to start with. So we will have an apiary too.

"But you mustn't think, dear friends, that we have been altogether idle all this time. Our farm is situated in the steppes, a long way from the nearest town. The climate here is very severe, in winter-time we have terrible frosts and blizzards. Sometimes there is so much snow that we have to ski to school. In the summer it is very hot. The blazing sun and the hot dry winds dry everything up and the soil gets parched and cracked. To fight the drought the farmers have to plant shelter belts. We Pioneers decided to help them. Our school also has its garden and experimental plot where we all do our share of work and we mean to work for a bumper crop.

“Dear friends, we know that you in the towns also plant trees and flowers and help to lay out parks and gardens. Now you are beginning to keep bees as well. Congratulations! Let us pledge to work better still, you in the town and we here in the village, so that we can contribute our small share to making our country bright and beautiful.

“Wishing you every success and hoping to hear from you, we close this letter with the Pioneer motto: For the Cause of Lenin-Stalin, Be Ready!”

“Always Ready!” we replied in chorus when we finished the letter.

When I went home I thought about that letter. I thought that we city Pioneers had really done very little compared to those collective-farm Pioneers and that we still had a long way to go before we could compete with them. I liked their letter very much and that is why I have copied it into my diary. Now I have finished copying it, I find I have come to the end of my diary and there's no more room to write.

I shall buy myself another note-book some time and continue my diary. But this will be all for the present.

Written by Pioneer *Kolya Sinitsin*





MISHKA'S PORRIDGE AND OTHER STORIES



MISHKA'S PORRIDGE

Last summer when I was living in the country with my mother, Mishka came to stay with us. I was very pleased to see him because I had been quite lonely without him. Mum was pleased to see him too.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said. "You two boys can keep each other company. I have to go to town early tomorrow, and I don't know when I'll be back. Do you think you can manage here by yourselves?"

"Of course we can," I said. "We aren't babies."

"You'll have to make your own breakfast. Do you know how to cook porridge?"

"I do," said Mishka. "It's easy as anything."

"Mishka," I said, "are you quite sure you know? When did you ever cook porridge?"

"Don't worry. I've seen Mum cook it. You leave it to me. I won't let you starve. I'll make you the best porridge you've ever tasted,"

In the morning Mum left us a supply of bread and some jam for our tea and showed us where the oatmeal was. She told us how to cook it too, but I didn't bother to listen. Why should I bother if Mishka knows all about it, I thought.

Then Mum went away and Mishka and I decided to go down to the river to fish. We got out our fishing-tackle and dug up some worms.

"Just a minute," I said. "Who's going to cook the porridge if we go down to the river?"

"Who wants to bother with cooking?" said Mishka. "It's too much trouble. We can eat bread and jam instead. There's plenty of bread. We'll cook the porridge later on when we get hungry."

We made a lot of jam sandwiches and went off to the river. We went in swimming and lay on the sandy beach afterwards drying ourselves and eating our sandwiches. Then we fished. We sat for a long time but the fish wouldn't bite. All we got was a dozen or so gudgeons, teeny-weeny ones. We spent most of the day down at the river. Late in the afternoon we got terribly hungry and hurried home to get something to eat.

"Now then, Mishka," I said. "You're the expert. What shall we make?"

"Let's make some porridge," said Mishka. "It's the easiest."

"All right," I said.

We lit the stove. Mishka got the meal and pot.

"See you make plenty while you're at it. I'm good and hungry."

He nearly filled the pot up with meal and poured in water up to the brim.

"Isn't that too much water?" I said.

"No, that's the way Mother makes it. You look after the stove and leave the porridge to me."

So I kept the fire going while Mishka cooked the porridge, which means that he sat and watched the pot, because the porridge cooked by itself.

Before long it got quite dark and we had to light the lamp. And the porridge went on cooking. Suddenly I looked up and saw the pot lid rising and the porridge spilling out over the side.

"Hey, Mishka," I said. "What's the matter with the porridge?"

"Why, what's wrong with it?"

"It's climbing right out of the pot!"

Mishka grabbed a spoon and began pushing the porridge back into the pot. He pushed and pushed, but it kept swelling up and spilling over the side.

"I don't know what's happened to it. Perhaps it's ready?"

I took a spoon and tasted a little, but the meal was still hard and dry.

"Where's all the water gone?"

"I don't know," said Mishka. "I put an awful lot in. Perhaps there's a hole in the pot?"

We looked all over the pot but there wasn't any sign of a hole.

"Must have evaporated," he said. "We'll have to add some more."

He took some of the porridge out of the pot and put it on a plate; he had to take out quite a bit to make room for the water. Then we put the pot back on the stove and let it cook some more. It cooked and cooked and after a while it began spilling over the side again.

"Hey, what's the idea!" cried Mishka. "Why won't it stay in the pot?"

He snatched up his spoon and scooped out some more porridge and added another cup of water.

"Look at that," he said. "You thought there was too much water."

The porridge went on cooking. And would you believe it, in a little while it lifted the lid and came crawling out again!

I said: "You must have put too much meal in. That's what it is. It swells when it cooks and there's not enough room in the pot for it."

"Yes, that must be it," said Mishka. "It's all your fault. You told me to put a lot in because you were hungry, remember?"

"How do I know how much to put in? You're the one who's supposed to know how to cook."

"So I do. I'd have it cooked by now if you hadn't interfered."

"All right, cook away, I shan't say another word."

I went off in a huff and Mishka went on cooking the porridge, that is, he kept scooping out the extra porridge and adding water. Soon the whole table was covered with plates of half-cooked porridge. And he added water each time.

Finally I lost patience.

"You're not doing it right. This way the porridge won't be ready till morning."

"Well, that's how they do it in big restaurants. Didn't you know that? They always cook dinner the night before so it should be ready by morning."

"That's all right for restaurants. They don't need to hurry because they have heaps of other food."

"We don't need to hurry either."

"Don't we! I'm starving. And besides it's time to go to bed. See how late it is."

"You'll have plenty of time to sleep," he said, throwing another glass of water into the pot. Suddenly it dawned on me what was wrong.

"Of course it won't cook if you keep adding cold water," I said.

"You think you can cook porridge without water?"

"No, I think you've still got too much meal in that pot."

I took the pot, spilled out half the meal and told him to fill it with water.

He took the mug and went to the pail.

"Dash it," he said. "The water's all gone."

"What shall we do now? It's pitch dark, we'll never be able to find the well."

"Rats, I'll bring some in a jiffy."

He took matches, tied a rope round the handle of the pail and went off to the well. In a few minutes he was back.

"Where's the water?" I asked him.

"Water? Out there in the well."

"Don't be silly. What've you done with the pail?"

"The pail? That's in the well too."

"In the well?"

"That's right."

"You mean you dropped it?"

"That's right."

"Oh, you silly ass! We'll starve to death this way. How are we going to get water now?"

"We can use the kettle."

I took the kettle. "Give me the rope."

"I haven't got it."

"Where is it?"

"Down there."

"Down where?"

"In the well."

"So you dropped the pail along with the rope?"

"That's right."

We started hunting for another piece of rope, but we couldn't find any.

"I'll go and ask the neighbours," said Mishka.

"You can't," I said. "Look at the time. Everyone's gone to bed long ago."

As luck would have it, I felt awfully thirsty. I was simply dying for a drink.

Mishka said: "It's always like that. When there's no water you always feel thirsty. That's why people always get thirsty in the desert—because there's no water in the desert."

"Never mind about deserts," I said. "You go and find some rope."

"Where shall I find it? I've looked everywhere. Let's use the fishing-line."

"Is it strong enough?"

"I think so."

"What if it isn't?"

"If it isn't, it'll break."

We unwound the fishing-line, tied it to the kettle and went out to the well. I lowered the kettle into the well and filled it with water. The line was as taut as a violin string.

"It's going to snap," I said. "You watch."

"Perhaps it'll hold if we lift it very, very carefully," said Mishka.

I raised it as carefully as I could. I had just got it above the water when there was a splash, and the kettle was gone.

"Did it break?" said Mishka.

"Of course it did. How are we going to get water now?"

"Let's try the samovar," said Mishka.

"No. We might as well throw the samovar straight into the well. Less trouble. Besides, we haven't any more rope."

"All right then, use the pot."

"We haven't so many pots to throw away," I said.

"Well, then, try a tumbler."

"Do you want to spend the rest of the night scooping up water by the tumblerful?"

"But what are we going to do? We've got to finish cooking the porridge. Besides, I'm terribly thirsty."

"Let's try the tin mug," I said. "It's a little bigger than a tumbler anyway."

We went back to the house, tied the fishing-line to the mug so that it wouldn't overturn and went back to the well. After we had drunk our fill of water Mishka said:

"That's what always happens—when you're thirsty you think you could drink up the sea, but when you begin drinking you find one mugful is plenty. That's because people are naturally greedy."

"Stop jabbering and bring the pot out here. We can fill it with water straight from the well. It will save us running back and forth a dozen times."

Mishka brought the pot and stood it right at the edge of the well. I very nearly knocked it off with my elbow.

"Silly ass," I said. "What's the idea of putting it right under my elbow? Hold on to it and keep as far from the well as you can, or you'll send it flying into the water."

Mishka took the pot and moved away from the well. I filled it up and we went back to the house. By this time our porridge was quite cold and the fire had gone out. We got it going again and put the pot back on the stove to cook. After a long time it started to boil, thickened gradually and made plopping noises.

"Hear that?" said Mishka. "We're going to have some wonderful porridge soon."

I took a little on a spoon and tasted it. It was awful! It had a nasty bitter burnt taste, and we had forgotten to salt it. Mishka tasted it too and spat it out at once.

"No," he said. "I'd rather die of hunger than eat such stuff."

"You would certainly die if you did eat it," I said.

"But what shall we do?"

"I don't know."

"Donkeys!" cried Mishka. "We've forgotten the fish."

"We're not going to start bothering with fish at this time of night. It will be morning soon."

"We won't boil them, we'll fry them. They'll be ready in a minute, you'll see."

"Oh, all right," I said. "But if it's going to take as long as the porridge, count me out."

"It'll be ready in five minutes, you'll see."

Mishka cleaned the fish and put them on the frying-pan. The pan got hot and the fish stuck to the bottom. He tried to pull them off and made quite a mess of them.

I said: "Whoever tried frying fish without butter?"

Mishka got a bottle of vegetable oil and poured some on to the pan and put it into the stove straight on the coals so it should cook faster. The oil spluttered and crackled and suddenly it caught fire. Mishka snatched up the frying-pan and I wanted to pour water on it, but there wasn't a drop of water in the house, so it burned and burned until all the oil had burned out. The room was full of smoke and all that was left of the fish were a few burned coals.

"Well," said Mishka, "what are we going to fry now?"

"No more frying. Besides spoiling good food you're liable to burn the house down. You've done enough cooking for one day!"

"But what shall we eat?"

We tried chewing raw meal but it wasn't much fun. We tried a raw onion, but it was bitter. We tried vegetable oil and nearly made ourselves sick. Finally we found the jam pot, licked it clean and went to bed. It was very late by then.

We woke up in the morning as hungry as wolves. Mishka wanted to cook some porridge, but when I saw him get out the meal I got cold all over.

“Don’t you dare,” I said. “I’ll go to Aunt Natasha, our landlady, and ask her to cook some porridge for us.”

We went to Aunt Natasha and told her all about it and promised to weed her garden for her if she would cook some porridge for us. She took pity on us and gave us some milk and cabbage pie while she cooked our porridge. And we ate and ate as if we couldn’t stop. Aunt Natasha’s little boy Vovka stood watching with his eyes popping out.

At last we had had enough. Aunt Natasha gave us a hook and some rope and we went to fish the pail and the kettle out of the well. It took us a long time before we finally managed to pull them up. But luckily nothing got lost. After that, Mishka and I and little Vovka weeded Aunt Natasha’s garden.

Mishka said: “Weeding is nothing. Anybody can do it. It’s easy. Much easier than cooking porridge, anyway.”





LADDY

Mishka and I had a wonderful time in the country this summer. I do love the country! You can do all sorts of exciting things like wandering about in the woods picking mushrooms or berries, bathing in the river and lying in the sun, and when you get tired of bathing, you can fish. When Mum's holiday ended and the time came to go back to town, Mishka and I felt very sad. We went about looking so miserable that Aunt Natasha took pity on us and persuaded Mum to let Mishka and me stay on for a while. She said Mum needn't worry, she would take good care of us. So Mum finally agreed and went back to town without us, and Mishka and I stayed on with Aunt Natasha.

Now Aunt Natasha had a dog called Diana. The day Mum left Diana had puppies. Six of them: five were black with brown spots and one was brown all over except for a black spot on his ear. When Aunt Natasha saw the puppies she said:

"Oh dear, that dog is a nuisance. She's always having puppies. What on earth shall I do with them? I shall have to drown them."

"Oh, please don't drown them!" we pleaded. "They want to live too. Better give them away to the neighbours."

"The neighbours have dogs of their own," said Aunt Natasha. "I can't keep so many dogs."

Mishka and I begged and pleaded. We promised to find homes for the puppies ourselves after they had grown up a little bit. At last Aunt Natasha gave in and said we might keep them.

Soon they grew bigger and started running about the garden and barking loudly like real dogs. Mishka and I had great fun playing with them.

Aunt Natasha kept reminding us of our promise to give them away, but we felt sorry for Diana. She would be very unhappy without her children.

"I ought never to have given in to you," said Aunt Natasha. "Now I'll be left with all these dogs on my hands. How shall I feed them all?"

So Mishka and I had to get busy and look for homes for the pups. And what a time we had! Nobody wanted to take them. We went from house to house for days and after a lot of trouble we managed to place three of them. Then two more were taken by some people in the neighbouring village. That left one—the pup with the black spot on its ear. We liked him the best. He had such a nice face and such beautiful eyes, big and round as if he was always wondering about

something. Mishka couldn't bear to part with him and so he wrote a letter to his mother.

"Dear Mum," he wrote. "Please let me keep a little puppy. He is so very sweet, he's brown all over except one ear which has a black spot on it, and I love him very much. If you let me keep him I promise to be very good and get good marks at school and I'll train him so he'll grow up to be a fine, big dog."

We named him Laddy. Mishka said he would buy a book about dogs and learn to train him properly.

* * *

Several days went by but there was no answer from Mishka's mother. When her letter finally came there was nothing in it about Laddy. She wrote telling us to come home at once because she was worried about us. Mishka and I got ready to leave that day. He decided to take Laddy without waiting for permission, because after all it wasn't his fault if his mother hadn't answered his letter.

"You can't take him with you," said Aunt Natasha. "Dogs aren't allowed in trains. If the conductor catches you, you'll have to pay a fine."

"The conductor won't see him," replied Mishka. "We'll hid him in my suit-case."

We emptied all Mishka's things into my knapsack, made several holes in his suit-case for Laddy to breathe through, put a piece of bread and some fried chicken inside in case he would get hungry and set off for the station. Aunt Natasha came to see us off.

All the way to the station Laddy was as quiet as a mouse. When Aunt Natasha went to buy our tickets we opened the bag to see what he was doing. There he was sitting quietly at the bottom blinking up at us.

“Good dog!” cried Mishka. “Clever boy! He knows how to behave.”

We stroked him a little and shut the bag. When the train came Aunt Natasha saw us safely inside and said good-bye. We found an empty seat in a quiet corner of the compartment. The only other passenger there was an old woman who was dozing on the seat opposite. Mishka stuck the bag under the seat. The train started and we were off.

* * *

At first everything was quiet, but at the next station a crowd of passengers came in. A long-legged girl with pigtails ran up to our quiet corner shouting at the top of her voice:

“Aunt Nadya! Uncle Fedya! Here’s a seat, come quick!”

Aunt Nadya and Uncle Fedya came down the aisle to our seat.

“Hurry up, hurry up!” she rattled. “Sit down quick. I’ll sit next to Aunt Nadya, and Uncle Fedya can sit beside the boys.”

“Hush, Lenchka. Don’t make so much noise,” said Aunt Nadya, and the two of them sat down next to the old lady on the opposite seat. Uncle Fedya shoved his bag under the seat and sat down beside us.

Lenchka clapped her hands and said: “Now, isn’t that nice—three gentlemen on one side and three ladies on the other.”

Mishka and I turned away and looked out of the window. For a while the only sounds were the clicking of the wheels and the engine puffing up in front. But suddenly there was a rustling noise under the seat and the sound of something scratching like a mouse.

“It’s Laddy,” whispered Mishka. “What if the conductor comes this way?”

“Perhaps he’ll quiet down in a minute.”

“But suppose he starts barking?”

The scratching continued. He must have been trying to scratch a hole in the bag.

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, a mouse!" squealed that stupid Lenchka, picking up her feet.

"Nonsense," said her Aunt Nadya. "Whoever heard of mice in a train."

"Oh, but it is! Can't you hear?"

Mishka coughed as loudly as he could and kicked the bag with his foot. For a minute or two Laddy was quiet, then he began to whine softly. Everyone looked surprised. But Mishka quickly ran his finger over the window-pane, making a squeaking noise on the glass. Uncle Fedya turned and looked at Mishka sternly.

"Stop that, young man!"

Just then someone farther down the carriage began to play the accordion and for a while you couldn't hear anything else. But soon the playing stopped.

"I say," Mishka whispered to me, "let's start singing."

"Oh, but what will they think of us," I objected.

"All right then, let's recite poetry as if we're learning it by heart."

"All right, you begin."

Something squeaked under the seat. Mishka coughed quickly and began in a hurry:

*Green the grassy meadow, bright the shining sun,
Gay the spring-time swallow; good cheer to everyone!*

The passengers laughed, and someone said: "It'll soon be autumn and here we have spring."

Lenchka giggled.

"Aren't they funny boys!" she said. "When they aren't imitating mice or making squeaky noises, they're reciting poetry."

But Mishka took no notice. As soon as he finished reciting one poem he went right on to the next, keeping time with his feet:

*Fresh and green my garden looks,
With lilac fragrance in the air,
With its cool and shady nooks,
With bird-cherry and linden fair.*

"There, now we have summer," joked the passengers. "The lilac is in bloom."

The next minute Mishka had plunged into the middle of winter:

*'Tis winter! The rejoicing peasant
Is seen again upon a sleigh.
His pony also finds it pleasant
To trot along the snow-clad way....*

After that he mixed everything up and autumn came right after winter:

*What a gloomy picture!
Clouds, and nothing more,
Rain from early morning,
Puddles by the door....*

Just then Laddy let out a pitiful whine and Mishka rushed on at the top of his voice:

*Why so early, Autumn,
With your chilly blight?
People's hearts are yearning
Still for warmth and light!*

The old lady who had been dozing on the opposite seat woke up, nodded her head and said: "True, child, true! Autumn has come far too soon. The little ones would like to play in the sunshine a little longer, but the summer is over. You recite very nicely, child, very nicely indeed."

She leaned over and stroked Mishka's head. Mishka kicked my foot under the seat to tell me to take over, but for the life of me I couldn't think of a single poem. The only thing that came into my head was a song, so I blurted it out as loudly as I could:

*My cosy little cottage,
Brand-new from floor to roof,
From maple floor and pine-wood wall
to shining shingle roof! . . .*

Uncle Fedya scowled. "Good God! Another elocutionist!"

Lenochka pouted and said: "Poof! Fancy reciting a silly thing like that!"

I rattled that song off twice and began another:

*I sit in my prison cell murky and dark,
An eagle, in irons—born free as a lark. . . .*

"They really ought to put you in a cell, young man, for getting on people's nerves!" growled Uncle Fedya.

"Now, Fedya," said Aunt Nadya, "I see no reason why the boys shouldn't recite verse if they want to!"

But Uncle Fedya fidgeted and rubbed his forehead as if his head ached. I stopped to catch my breath and Mishka carried on, this time slowly, with expression:

*Serene is the Ukrainian night.
The sky is clear, the stars are shining. . . .*

The passengers roared with laughter. "Well, well, now we're in the Ukraine. Where will he take us next?"

More people came in at the next stop. "Listen to that youngster reciting!" they remarked to one another. "The journey won't be dull."

By now Mishka was in the Caucasus:

*The Caucasus lies at my feet, while alone
I stand at the edge of the dizzy abyss....*

He went nearly all around the world, but by the time he got to the Far North he was quite hoarse and it was my turn. I couldn't remember any more verses, so I recited another song:

*All the world around I travelled,
Nowhere could I find my love....*

Lenochka burst out laughing. "That one only knows songs!" she squeaked.

"I can't help it if Mishka has recited all the poems," I said and began another song:

*It's a jolly young head on my shoulders,
But I doubt that I'll keep it there long....*

"You won't," said Uncle Fedya, "if you go on annoying people like this." He rubbed his forehead with a sigh, pulled the bag from under the seat and went out.

* * *

The train was approaching town. The passengers got up, gathered their belongings and moved towards the exit. We pulled out the bag and the knapsack and followed the others on to the platform. There was no sound from the bag.

"Look at that," said Mishka, "when it doesn't matter he keeps quiet, but when he ought to have kept quiet he made all that noise."

"Perhaps he's suffocated in there. We'd better take a look," I said. Mishka put the bag down and opened it. Laddy wasn't there! There were some books, note-pads, a towel, soap, a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, and knitting-needles, but no dog.

"Where's Laddy?" said Mishka.

"We've got the wrong bag!"

Mishka examined it. "So we have. Ours had holes in it, and besides it was dark brown, and this one is yellow. What an ass I am. I've gone and taken someone else's bag."

"Let's run back to the station, perhaps our bag is still under the seat." We ran back to the station. The train was still standing, but we had forgotten what carriage we had travelled in, so we ran through the whole train looking under the seats. But there was no sign of our suit-case.

"Someone must have taken it," I said.

"Let's go through the carriages again," Mishka proposed.

We searched the train once more, but we didn't find any trace of our bag. We were wondering what to do when a conductor came up and chased us away.

We went home. I went to Mishka's place to get my knapsack. Mishka's mother saw that something was amiss.

"What's the trouble?" she asked.

"We've lost Laddy."

"Who is Laddy?"

"The puppy we brought from the country. Didn't you get my letter?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, I wrote you all about it." And Mishka told his mother the whole story: what a wonderful pup Laddy was, how we had packed him in the bag and how the bag got lost. By the time he finished he was in tears. I don't know what happened after that because I went home.

* * *

Next day Mishka came to my place and said:

"You know what? It turns out I'm a thief!"

"How's that?"

"Because I took someone's luggage."

"But you took it by mistake."

"I know. But someone might think I did it on purpose. Besides, the owner must be looking for it. I've got to get it back to him somehow."

"How will you find him?"

"I'll put up notices all over town. The owner will read them and come here for his bag."

"That's right," I said. "Let's write the notices now."

We cut up slips of paper and wrote in neat letters on each one:

"Found. A suit-case. In the train. Apply to Misha Kozlov. Peschanaya Street No. 8, Apartment 3."

After we had written out about twenty notices, I said:

"Now let's write a notice about Laddy. Someone may have taken our bag by mistake too."

"Yes, it must have been the man sitting next to us," said Mishka.

We cut up some more slips of paper and wrote another notice:

"Lost. A puppy in a suit-case. Please return to Misha Kozlov or write to Peschanaya Street No. 8, Apartment 3."

We wrote about twenty of these notices too and went out to paste them up. We stuck them on lamp-posts and on the walls. Very soon

we had used up all our slips and went home to write some more. We were busy writing when the bell rang. Mishka ran to open the door. A strange woman came in.

"May I speak to Misha Kozlov?" she said.

"I'm Misha Kozlov," Mishka answered, looking surprised. How could the woman have known his name?

"I saw your notice," she said. "I lost a suit-case in the train."

"A suit-case?" said Mishka joyfully. "Just a moment, I'll go and get it." He ran into the next room and came back lugging the suit-case.

"Here it is."

The woman looked at it and shook her head. "No," she said. "That isn't mine."

"Not yours?" cried Mishka.

"Mine was bigger. Besides, it was black, this one is light brown."

"Then I'm sorry, we haven't got yours. This is the only one we found. But if we do find yours we'll be very glad to return it to you."

The woman laughed.

"You're a funny pair. That's not the way to return lost property. You ought not to show the bag to anyone who asks for it. You must first ask the person what sort of a suit-case he lost and what was in it. If he answers right, then you can give him the suit-case. Otherwise some dishonest person might take something that doesn't belong to him. There are all sorts of people, you know."

"We never thought of that," said Mishka.

"See how quickly our notices worked," said Mishka to me when the woman had gone. "We haven't finished pasting them all up yet and people are beginning to come already. At this rate we may find Laddy soon."

No one else came that day. But the next the bell kept ringing all the time. Mishka and I were surprised. We never thought so many people lost suit-cases in trains. But the real owner didn't appear. All sorts of people came. There was a man who had lost his bag in a tram-car, and another who had left a box of nails in a bus, and an old woman who had a trunk stolen from her—they all came hoping to find their belongings in Mishka's place. They must have thought that if we had found one suit-case we must be able to find all sorts of other things.

"I wish someone would find my bag," said Mishka.

"Yes, they could write a note to us at least, couldn't they? We would go for it ourselves."

* * *

One day Mishka and I were sitting at home when someone knocked at the door.



Mishka ran to answer it and came back with a letter. He was all excited.

"Perhaps it's some news about Laddy," he said, examining the address scrawled on the envelope which was covered with all sorts of queer postmarks and stamps.

"It's not for us at all," he said finally. "It's for Mum. Some brilliant scholar must have written it, judging by the way the address is spelt. Two mistakes in Peschanaya Street. He's written Pechnaya Street instead of Peschanaya. The letter must have travelled all over town before it reached us. Mum! Here's a letter for you from some grammarian."

"I don't know any grammarians."

"Well, read it."

Mishka's mother opened the envelope and began reading to herself:

"Dear Mum. Please let me keep a little puppy. He is so very sweet, he's brown all over except one ear which has a black spot on it, and I love him very much. . . ." "Why," says Mishka's mother. "It's your own letter."

I burst out laughing and looked at Mishka. He turned red as a beet-root and ran out of the room.

* * *

Mishka and I gave up hope of ever finding Laddy but Mishka couldn't forget him. He often talked about him.

"I wonder where he is now?" he would say. "What sort of a master has he got? I do hope he isn't a cruel man who beats dogs. Perhaps nobody took Laddy out of the suit-case and he died of hunger? I

wouldn't even mind not getting him back so long as I knew he was alive and happy."

Before long the holidays were over and school started again. We were glad because we liked school and we were a bit tired of doing nothing.

On the first day of the term I got up very early, put on my new clothes and hurried off to Mishka's to wake him up. I met him on the stairs. He was coming to wake me up too.

We thought we would have the same teacher as last term, but when we came to school we found we had a new one. Vera Alexandrovna, our old teacher, had been transferred to another school. Our new teacher's name was Nadezhda Viktorovna.

Nadezhda Viktorovna gave us the time-table and told us what textbooks we would need, and then she called on each one of us so as to get acquainted. After that she asked us whether we had learned Pushkin's poem "Winter" the previous term. We said we had.

"Do you still remember it?" she asked.

The class was silent. I nudged Mishka and whispered: "You remember it, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then raise your hand."

Mishka raised his hand.

"Very well, come out here and recite it," said the teacher.



Mishka went over and stood by her desk and began to recite with expression:

*'Tis winter! The rejoicing peasant
Is seen again upon a sleigh.
His pony also finds it pleasant
To trot along the snow-clad way. . . .*

I noticed that the teacher was staring at him. Her forehead was puckered as if she were trying to remember something. Suddenly she stopped him and said:

"Just a moment. I remember now. Aren't you the boy who recited verses in the train this summer?"

Mishka turned red. "Yes, it was me," he said.

"Hm. Well, that will do now. Come to the common-room after class. I should like to talk to you."

"Shall I finish the poem?" Mishka asked.

"No. I can see that you know it quite well."

Mishka sat down and kicked my foot under the seat.

"It's her! She was with the girl Lenochka and the man who kept making nasty remarks about us. Uncle Fedya they called him. Remember?"

"Yes," I said. "I recognized her the minute you started reciting."

"What shall I do?" Mishka said, looking worried. "Why did she tell me to stay behind? I suppose she's going to tell me off for misbehaving that time in the train."

We were so worried that we hardly noticed how the lessons ended. We were the last to leave the class-room. Mishka went to the common-room and I waited outside in the corridor. At last he came out.

"Well, what did she say?"

"It turns out it was her suit-case we took, or rather not hers but that man's, which amounts to the same thing. It's theirs all right, because she told me exactly what was in it, and it all fits. She asked me to bring it to them this evening. Here's the address."

He showed me a slip of paper with an address on it. We hurried home, took the bag and set out.

We found the house without much trouble and rang the bell. The door was opened by that girl Lenchka we had seen in the train.

She asked us whom we wanted, but we had forgotten our new teacher's name and we didn't know whom to ask for.

"Half a mo," said Mishka. "It must be written here on the address. Here it is: Nadezhda Viktorovna."

"Oh," said the girl, "you've brought our suit-case! Come in." She showed us into a room and called:

"Aunt Nadya, Uncle Fedya, the boys have come with the suit-case."

Nadezhda Viktorovna and Uncle Fedya came in. Uncle Fedya opened the bag, snatched up his glasses and put them on his nose at once.

"My favourite spectacles, at last!" he cried, beaming all over. "I'm so glad I've found them. I couldn't get used to those new ones at all."

"We posted notices all over town as soon as we found we had taken the wrong suit-case by mistake," Mishka explained.

"Oh, I never read notices," said Uncle Fedya. "That just shows you. Next time I lose something I shall certainly read all the notices."

Just then a little dog came running into the room after Lenchka. He was brown all over except for one ear which was black.

"Look!" whispered Mishka.

The pup pricked up his ears and looked at us with his head cocked to one side.

“Laddy!” we cried.

Laddy gave a yelp of joy and rushed at us, jumping on us and barking excitedly. Mishka picked him up and hugged him.

“Laddy! Dear old Laddy. So you haven’t forgotten us after all.”

Laddy licked his face and Mishka kissed him right on the nose. Lenochka laughed and clapped her hands.

“He was in the bag we brought from the train. We must have taken yours by mistake. It’s all Uncle Fedya’s fault!”

“Yes,” said Uncle Fedya. “It’s all my fault. I took your bag and went out first, and you took mine, thinking it was yours.”

They gave us back our bag, the one Laddy had travelled in. I could see that Lenochka didn’t want to part with Laddy. She looked as though she were going to cry, but Mishka promised her that next year when Diana had puppies we would choose the prettiest one and bring it to her.

“Really and truly? You won’t forget, will you?” she begged.

We said we would not forget. Then we said good-bye and left. Mishka carried Laddy who kept turning his head this way and that and taking an interest in everything he saw. Evidently Lenochka had kept him in the house all the time for fear he would run away.

When we came home we found several people waiting for us.

“Are you the boys who found a suit-case?” they asked.

“Yes,” we said, “but there isn’t any suit-case any more. We’ve returned it to the owner.”

“Then why haven’t you taken down the notices? Making folks waste time for nothing.”

They grumbled some more and went away. That same day Mishka and I went for a walk and tore down all the notices.



THE TELEPHONE

One day Mishka and I saw a wonderful new toy in a shop. It was a telephone set that worked just like a real one. There were two telephones and a coil of wire all packed neatly in a big wooden box. The sales-girl told us that you could use it between flats in the same house. You put one receiver in one flat and the other in the flat next door and connected them with the wire.

Now, Mishka and I live in the same house, my flat is one floor above his, and we thought it would be great fun to be able to telephone to each other whenever we wanted to.

“Besides,” said Mishka, “it’s not an ordinary toy that gets broken and thrown out. It’s a useful toy.”

“Yes,” I said. “You can have a talk with your neighbour without running up and down stairs.”

"A great convenience," said Mishka, all excited. "You can sit home and talk as much as you wish."

We decided to save up money to buy the telephone. For two weeks we didn't eat any ice-cream and we didn't go to the pictures, and by the end of two weeks we had enough money put away to buy the telephone.

We hurried home from the shop with the box, installed one of the telephones in my flat and the other in Mishka's and ran the wire through my window to Mishka's room.

"Now then," said Mishka. "Let's try it out. You run upstairs and wait for my call."

I dashed up to my place, picked up the receiver, and there was Mishka's voice already shouting:

"Hallo! Hallo!"

I yelled back "Hallo" at the top of my voice.

"Can you hear me?" shouted Mishka.

"Yes, I can hear you. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you. Isn't it wonderful! Do you hear me well?"

"Fine. What about you?"

"Me too. Ha! Ha! Do you hear me laughing?"

"Of course. Ha! Ha! Ha! Can you hear that?"

"Yes. Now listen, I'm coming up to you right away."

He came running in to my place and we hugged each other with joy.

"Aren't you glad we have a telephone? Isn't it grand?"

"Yes," I said.

"Now, I'll go back and call you up again."

He ran back. The phone rang again. I picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Do you hear me?"

"I hear you perfectly."

"Do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Me too. Now let's have a talk."

"Yes, let's. What shall we talk about?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. Are you glad we bought the telephone?"

"Very glad."

"It would be awful if we hadn't bought it, wouldn't it?"

"Terrible."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Why don't you say something?"

"Say something yourself."

"I don't know what to say," said Mishka. "It's always like that. When you need to talk you don't know what to say, but when you know you mustn't talk you can't stop."

I said: "I know what: I'll hang up and think for a while, and when I think of something to say I'll call you."

"All right."

I hung up and started to think. Suddenly the phone rang. I picked up the receiver.

"Well, have you thought of something?" asked Mishka.

"Not yet, have you?"

"No, I haven't."

"Then what did you ring up for?"

"I thought you had thought of something."

"I would have phoned if I had."

"I thought you mightn't think of it."

"Think I'm a donkey or what?"

"Did I say you're a donkey?"

"What did you say then?"

"Nothing. I said you weren't a donkey."

"Oh, all right, that's enough about donkeys. We'd better stop fooling and do our lessons."

"Yes, so we had."

I hung up and sat down to do my lessons. I had just opened the book when the phone rang.

"Listen. I'm going to sing and play the piano over the phone."

"Go ahead."

I heard a crackling noise, then the thumping of a piano and suddenly a voice that didn't sound a bit like Mishka's sang:

*Whither have you fled,
Golden days of my youth?...*

What on earth could it be, I wondered. Where could Mishka have learned to sing like that?

Just then Mishka came in, grinning from ear to ear.

"You thought it was me singing? It is the gramophone! Let me listen too."

I handed him the receiver. He listened for a while, then suddenly he dropped the receiver in a great hurry and dashed downstairs. I put the phone to my ear and heard an awful buzzing and hissing. The record must have run down.

I sat down again to do my lessons. The telephone rang. I took off the receiver.

"Bow! Wow!" sounded in my ear.

"What're you barking for?"

"It's not me, it's Laddy. Can you hear him biting at the receiver?"

"Yes."

"I'm pushing the receiver against his nose and he's gnawing at it."

"He'll chew up your telephone if you're not careful."

"Oh, nothing will happen to it, it's made of iron. Ouch! He bit me that time. You bad dog, get down! How dare you bite me! Take that! (Bow! Wow!) You rascal. He bit me, did you hear that?"

"Yes, I heard," I said.

I sat down again to do my lessons, but the next minute the telephone rang again. This time there was a loud buzzing in the receiver.

"What's that?"

"A fly."

"Where is it?"

"I'm holding it in front of the receiver and it's buzzing and whirring its wings."

Mishka and I telephoned to each other all day long. We invented all sorts of tricks: we sang, we shouted, we roared, we miaowed, we whispered—and you could hear everything. It was pretty late before I finally finished my lessons. I decided to call up Mishka before going to bed.

I rang up but there was no answer.

What could have happened, I wondered. Had his telephone stopped working already?

I called again, but there was no answer. I ran downstairs and, would you believe it, there was Mishka taking his telephone to pieces! He had pulled out the battery, taken the bell apart and was beginning to unscrew the receiver.

"Here!" I said. "What are you busting the telephone for?"

"I'm not. I'm only taking it apart to see how it's made. I'll put it together again."

"You won't be able to. You don't know how."

"Who says I don't? It's easy."

He unscrewed the receiver, took out some bits of metal and started to pry open a round metal plate inside. The plate flew off and some

black powder spilt out. Mishka got frightened and tried to put the powder back into the receiver.

"Now you've gone and done it!" I said.

"That's nothing. I can put it together again in a jiffy!"

He worked and worked but it wasn't as easy as he thought, because the screws were very tiny and it was hard to get them into place. At last he had everything put back except a small piece of metal and two screws.

"What's that thing for?" I asked him.

"Oh dear, I forgot to put it in," says Mishka. "How silly of me! It should have been screwed inside. I'll have to take it apart again."

"All right," I said. "I'm going home. Call me up when you've finished."

I went home and waited. I waited and waited but there was no call, so I went to bed.

The next morning the telephone rang so loudly that I thought the house was on fire. I sprang out of bed, snatched up the receiver and yelled:

"Hallo!"

"What are you grunting like that for?" said Mishka.

"I'm not grunting."

"Stop grunting and talk properly!" shouted Mishka. He sounded quite sore.

"But I am talking properly. Why should I grunt anyway?"

"Don't be a clown. I won't believe you've got a pig there anyway."

"But there isn't any pig here, I'm telling you!" I shouted, getting angry too.

Mishka said nothing.

A minute later he burst into my room.

"What do you mean by making pig noises over the phone?"

"I wasn't doing anything of the kind."

"I heard you quite plainly."

"What should I want to make pig noises for?"

"How do I know? All I know is there was someone grunting into my ear. You go downstairs and try it yourself."

I went down to his place, rang him up and shouted:

"Hallo!"

"Grunt, grunt, grunt, grunt!" was all I heard in reply.

I saw what had happened and I ran back to tell Mishka.

"It's all your doing," I said. "You've gone and busted the telephone."

"How's that?"

"You spoiled something in the receiver when you took it apart."

"I must have put it back the wrong way," said Mishka. "I'll have to fix it."

"How will you fix it?"

"I'll take your telephone apart and see how it's made."

"Oh no, you won't! I'm not going to let you ruin my telephone too."

"You needn't be afraid. I'll be very careful. If I don't mend it we won't be able to use the phone at all."

I had to give in and he got busy at once. He tinkered with it for a long time and when he had finished "fixing" it, it stopped working altogether. It didn't even grunt any more.

"What are we going to do now?" I said.

"I'll tell you what," said Mishka. "Let's go back to the shop and ask them to repair it for us."

We went to the shop but they said they didn't repair telephones and they couldn't tell us where we could get ours repaired. We felt pretty miserable all that day. Then Mishka had an idea.

"We *are* donkeys! We can telegraph to each other."

"How?"

"You know, dots and dashes. The bell still works. We can use that. A short bell can be a dot, and a long bell will be a dash. We can learn the Morse code and send messages to each other."

We got hold of the Morse code and started studying it. A dot and a dash stands for A, a dash and three dots for B, a dot and two dashes for C, and so on. We soon learned the whole alphabet and began sending messages. It went pretty slow at first, but after a while we were tapping away on our bell like real telegraphers. It was even more exciting than a telephone. But it didn't last long. One morning I called Mishka, but there was no answer. He must be sleeping, I thought. So I called later, but there was still no answer. I went down to him and knocked at his door. Mishka opened it for me.

"You don't need to knock any more. You can ring."

He pointed to the button on the door.

"What's that?"

"A bell."

"Go on!"

"Yes, an electric door-bell. From now on you can ring instead of knocking."

"Where did you get it?"

"I made it myself."

"How?"

"I made it out of the telephone."

"What?"

"Yes. I took the bell out of the telephone, and the button as well. And I took the battery out too. What's the use of having a toy when you can make something useful out of it."

"But you had no right to take the telephone apart," I said.

"Why not? I took mine apart, not yours."

"Yes, but the telephone belongs to both of us. If I had known you were going to take it to pieces I wouldn't have chipped in with you and bought it. I don't need a telephone that doesn't work."

"You don't need a telephone at all. We don't live so far from each other. If you want to talk to me you can come downstairs."

"I never want to talk to you again," I said and walked out.

I was so angry with him I didn't talk to him for three whole days. I was very lonely all by myself, so I took my telephone apart and made a door-bell out of it too. But I didn't do it the way Mishka did. I made mine properly. I put the battery on a shelf near the door and ran a wire from it along the wall to the bell and the button. I screwed the push-button in properly so it didn't hang on one nail like Mishka's. Even Mum and Dad praised me for doing such a neat job.

I went down to tell Mishka about my bell.

I pressed the button on his door, but nobody answered. I pressed it several times but I didn't hear it ring. So I knocked. Mishka opened the door.

"What's wrong with your bell? Doesn't it work?"

"No, it's out of order."

"What's the trouble?"

"I took the battery apart."

"You what!?"

"Yes. I wanted to see what it was made of."

"Well, what are you going to do now without a telephone or a bell?" I asked him.

"Oh, I'll manage somehow," he answered with a sigh.

I went home feeling puzzled. What makes Mishka do such things? Why does he have to break everything? I felt quite sorry for him.

That night I couldn't sleep for a long time for thinking about our telephone and the bell we had made out of it. Then I thought about electricity and where the electricity inside the batteries came from. Everyone else was fast asleep but I lay awake thinking about all these things. After a while I got up, switched on the light, took my battery off the shelf and broke it open. There was some sort of liquid inside with a small black stick wrapped in a piece of cloth dipped in it. So that was it! The electricity came from that liquid. I carefully put the battery back on the shelf and went to bed again. I fell asleep at once.



OUR FIR-TREE PARTY

Mishka and I had quite an adventure on the eve of the New Year's holiday. We prepared for the holidays well in advance. We made paper chains and flags and all sorts of decorations for the Fir-Tree. Everything would have been fine if Mishka hadn't got hold of a book called *Popular Chemistry* where he read how to make Bengal lights. That started the trouble. For days on end he did nothing but experiment with his Bengal lights—pounding sulphur and sugar, making aluminium shavings, mixing them all together and setting them alight. But nothing came of it all except a lot of smoke and a very nasty smell. The neighbours raised a fuss, but Mishka didn't give up. He had invited a lot of boys from our class to his New Year's party and had announced that he would show them a fire-work display.

"I'll have some marvellous fire-works!" he told them. "They sparkle like diamonds and scatter showers of sparks all around."

"I wouldn't boast so much if I were you," I told him. "You haven't made any yet. Won't you look silly when the boys come to your party and there aren't any fire-works!"

"Oh, but there will be. You'll see. There's heaps of time yet."

On the day before New Year's Eve he came to my place and said:

"We ought to go for our fir-trees or we'll be left without any."

"It's too late today," I said. "Let's go tomorrow."

"Tomorrow we shall have to decorate them."

"We can do that in the evening. We'll go for the trees during the day right after school."

Mishka agreed. We weren't going to buy our trees in town. We had decided to get them straight from the woods. We were going to Gorlino where we had spent the summer holidays. Our Aunt Natasha lived there all the year round. Her husband is a forest-warden and he had invited us to come to him for our New Year's fir-trees.

I had told my mother all about it and she had agreed to let me go. So the next day I called for Mishka right after lunch. He was pounding away at his Bengal lights in a mortar when I came in.

"Look here," I said. "We've got to be going and here you are fussing with your silly fire-works. You should have made them before."

"I did make one batch, but I must have put too little sulphur in. They won't burn. All they do is hiss."

"Well, they won't burn just now anyway, so you'd better come along."

"No, I'm sure they'll burn this time. All they need is a little more sulphur. Let me have that aluminium pot, will you? The one on the window-sill."

"There isn't any pot here. There's only a frying-pan."

"That's not a frying-pan. That's the pot I've been using for aluminium shavings. Give it here."

I handed it to him and he started working on the edge with his file, slicing off shavings.

"So that's how the pot became a frying-pan?"

"Yes," said Mishka. "But that's all right, a frying-pan is also useful."

"Does your mother think so?"

"She hasn't seen it yet."

"Well, she will some time."

"What of it? I'll buy her another one when I grow up."

"She'll have to wait a long time."

"Oh, that's all right. It was an old pot anyway. Besides, the handle was broken off."

He mixed the aluminium shavings with sulphur and glue until he got a sort of thick paste, which he rolled into small pieces like sausages, stuck them on wires and laid them out on a piece of wood to dry.

"There," he said. "As soon as they dry they'll be ready. But I mustn't let Laddy get at them, or he'll gobble them up."

"Go on. Do dogs eat Bengal lights too?"

"I don't know about other dogs, but Laddy does. Once I left a batch there beside the stove to dry and he chewed them all up. He must have thought they were sweets or something."

"All right, put them in the oven. It's warm in there and Laddy won't be able to get at them."

"No, that's no good either. Yesterday I hid them in the oven and Mum came and lighted the stove and they all got burnt to cinders. I'll put them on top of the cupboard."

He climbed on a chair and laid the tray with the fire-works on top of the cupboard.

"You know Laddy," he said, "he's always grabbing my things. Remember that time he hid my left boot? We couldn't find it anywhere. I had to wear my *valenki* until Mum bought me a new pair of boots. It was warm outside already and I went about in those heavy *valenki* as if I had frozen feet. When I got my new boots I threw away the odd one, because who needs one boot anyway? But after I'd thrown it away I found the other boot. Laddy had hidden it under the kitchen stove. So we had to throw that one away too, because we'd thrown the other one away, see? If we hadn't thrown it away I'd have an extra pair of boots. That just shows you."

"Stop jabbering," I said, "and let's go. We're late as it is."

Mishka grabbed his coat and an axe and we rushed off to the station. We took the first train to Gorelkino. When we got there we went straight to the forest.

It was quite a dense forest and we had plenty of trees to choose from, but Mishka didn't like any of them.

"Once I'm here I'm going to get the best fir-tree there is," he declared, "otherwise there's no sense in coming all the way out here."

So we walked quite a long way into the forest.

"We'd better hurry up and cut down our trees," I said. "It'll soon be dark."

"But there aren't any decent trees," said Mishka.

"Look," I said, "there's a nice one."

Mishka examined it from all sides. "Not bad, not bad, but I've seen better. No, I don't like it. It's . . . it's skimpy."

"What's skimpy about it?"

"It isn't tall enough to begin with. I wouldn't take a skimpy-looking tree like that for anything."

We found another tree.

"Lop-sided," said Mishka.

"What do you mean, lop-sided?"

"Can't you see the leg's crooked at the bottom."

"The what?"

"All right, the trunk then."

The next tree we examined Mishka didn't like either. He said it was bald.

"You're bald yourself. How can a fir-tree be bald!"

"Well, this one is. See how thin it is. Hardly any greenery, only a stick with a few needles on it."

And so it went on. Finally I lost patience.

"Look here," I said, "if you go on like this it'll be midnight before we get our trees." I chose a nice tree for myself, cut it down and gave the axe to Mishka.

"Now, cut one for yourself and let's go, or we'll never get home."

But Mishka seemed to have made up his mind to search the whole forest. I argued and pleaded with him but nothing helped. At last he found a tree to his liking and cut it down and we set out for the station. We walked and walked but we only went deeper and deeper into the forest.

"Perhaps we're going in the wrong direction?" said Mishka.

We turned and went the other way. We walked and walked and the woods went on and on. By now it was beginning to get dark. We kept turning this way and that until we saw that we were hopelessly lost.

"It's all your fault!" I said.

"Why is it my fault? How was I to know it would get dark so soon?"

"If you hadn't wasted all that time choosing a tree and messing about with your fire-works we'd have been home long ago. Now we'll have to spend the night here all because of you."

"Oh no!" said Mishka. "We must get back tonight. The boys are coming."

Before long it grew quite dark. The moon came out and the black trunks of the trees looked like dark mysterious giants. We began to imagine wolves hiding behind every tree. We were so frightened that we stood still, afraid to move a step further.

"Let's shout," Mishka proposed.

"Hallo!" we shouted together.

"Hallo!" the forest answered.

"What's that?" asked Mishka in a frightened whisper.

"The echo," I replied and shouted again: "Halloo!"

"Halloo!" the echo answered.

"Perhaps we'd better not shout," said Mishka.

"Why?"

"The wolves might hear and come after us."

"I bet there aren't any wolves around here."

"But suppose there are. Let's run away from here."

I said: "We'd better keep going or we'll never get out on to the road."

We set off again. Mishka kept glancing over his shoulder.

"What do people do when they are attacked by wolves?" he asked.

"They shoot at them, I suppose."

"But suppose they haven't got a rifle?"

"They throw burning sticks of wood at them."

"Where do you get them from?"

"You build a fire."

"Got any matches?"

"No."

"Can they climb trees?"

"Who?"

"Wolves."

"Oh, wolves. No, they can't climb trees."

"Good, then when they attack us we'll climb the nearest tree and stay there until morning."

"Think you could sit on a tree all night?"

"Sure, I could."

"You'd freeze solid and drop down."

"It isn't as cold as all that."

"You just think it isn't because we're moving, but you try sitting on a tree without moving for a long time, you'll freeze for sure."

"You can wiggle your legs to keep warm."

"I can just see you sitting all night on a tree wiggling your legs."

We pushed on through dense underbrush, stumbling over tree-stumps in the darkness and sinking knee-deep in the snow until we were ready to drop from weariness.

"Let's throw our trees away," I suggested.

"I can't," said Mishka. "The boys are coming this evening. How can I have a Fir-Tree party without a tree?"

"We'll be lucky if we get home safely ourselves, let alone worrying about trees."

Mishka said: "Let's walk single file. We can take turns breaking the trail."

We stopped and rested for a while. Then Mishka set off, taking the lead, and I followed behind. After we had gone some distance I stopped for a minute to shift my tree to my other shoulder. When I looked up again, Mishka was gone. He had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"Mishka! Mishka!" I called.

There was no reply.

"Hey, Mishka! Where are you?"



Silence.

I walked ahead carefully and stopped short at the very brink of a deep gully. Another step and I would have been over the edge. I looked down and saw something dark in the snow.

"Hey, Mishka, is that you?"

"Yes. I must have slipped."

"Why didn't you answer when I shouted?"

"I've hurt my leg!"

I climbed down into the gully and there was Mishka sitting in the middle of a path at the bottom rubbing his knee.

"What's wrong?"

"I hit my knee."

"Does it hurt?"

"Like the dickens. I think I'll sit here for a while."

"All right, let's have a rest."

We sat together on the snow. After a while we began to feel cold.

"We can freeze to death this way," I said. "We'd better get moving. This path ought to lead us somewhere, either to the station or the village."

Mishka tried to get up but groaned and sat down again.

"I can't move," he said.

"Oh dear, what are we going to do? Climb on to my back and I'll try to carry you."

"I'm too heavy."

"Let's try."

Mishka got up and with a lot of puffing and groaning finally climbed on to my back. Golly, he was heavy! I was bent over double.

"All right, let's go," said Mishka.

I took a few steps, slipped and went sprawling into the snow.

Mishka let out a yell. "Ow, my leg! Can't you be more careful!"

"I didn't do it on purpose."

"You shouldn't have tried carrying me if you couldn't do it."

I got very angry. "You make me sick," I said. "First you waste time fussing with your fire-works, then you spend hours choosing a tree, and now you go and get yourself hurt. We'll both freeze to death here because of you."

"You don't need to stay with me. You can go on by yourself. I know it's all my fault."

"How can I leave you here alone? We came together and we'll go back together. We just have to think of a way out, that's all."

"I don't see what we can do."

"Suppose we make a sled. We've got an axe."

"How can you make a sled out of an axe?"

"Not out of an axe, silly. We can cut down a tree and make a sled out of that."

"We haven't any nails."

"Wait. Let me think," I said.

I thought and thought while Mishka sat on the snow beside me. I dragged the fir-tree over to him.

"You better sit on this, you'll catch cold sitting on the snow."

He moved on to the tree. Just then I had a brilliant idea.

“Mishka,” I said. “The tree will do for a sled.”

“How?”

“You sit on the branches and I’ll pull you along by the trunk. Let’s try it. Hold on.”

I took hold of the trunk and pulled. It worked beautifully. The snow on the road was hard and smooth and the tree slid lightly over it with Mishka riding on it as if it were a sled.

“Wonderful!” I said. “Now you can take the axe.” I tossed him the axe. Mishka settled himself more comfortably and I hauled him along the road. Very soon we came out of the woods and saw lights not far off.

“Mishka,” I cried. “It’s the station!”

Just then we heard a train coming.

“Hurry up, or we’ll miss it,” cried Mishka.

I ran as fast as I could with Mishka behind me yelling:

“Faster! Hurry! We’ll miss the train!”

We reached the station just as the train was pulling in. I bundled Mishka in and jumped on to the step as the train moved off, and pulled the fir-tree in after me. The passengers objected at first to our bringing a prickly tree into a railway carriage.

“Wherever did you get such a bedraggled-looking tree?” someone asked.

But when we told them about our adventure in the woods they all felt sorry for us. One woman sat Mishka down beside her, took his boot off and examined his sore knee.

“It’s nothing serious,” she said. “Only a bruise.”

“I thought I’d broken my leg, it hurt so badly,” said Mishka.

“Never mind, it’ll mend before you’re wed!” someone said. And everyone laughed. One old lady gave us a pie each and someone else



gave us sweets. We were very glad because we were pretty hungry by this time.

“What shall we do with only one tree between us?” I said.

“Let me have it for this evening,” said Mishka.

“I like that! I dragged it all the way through the woods and hauled you on it besides, and now I’ll be left without any tree at all.”

“I only want it for tonight. You can have it tomorrow.”

“No, I want a tree tonight. Everybody will have one except me.”

“But can’t you understand? The boys are coming tonight. I must have a fir-tree.”

“You’ll have your Bengal lights. The boys won’t miss the tree.”

“I don’t know whether the Bengal lights will work. I’ve tried making them twenty times and nothing happened. Nothing but smoke and a bad smell.”

“Perhaps they’ll work this time.”

"No, I won't even mention them. Perhaps the boys have forgotten about them."

"I'm sure they haven't. You boasted far too much."

"You see, if I had a tree I could invent some excuse for not having the Bengal lights and get out of it somehow, but I don't know what to do now."

"No," I said. "I can't give you the tree. It won't be like New Year without a tree."

"Oh, be a pal. You've got me out of more than one fix, don't fail me this time."

"Why must I always be getting you out of fixes?"

"This is positively the last time. I'll give you anything you want in exchange. You can have my skis or my skates. I'll give you my magic lantern, my stamp album. You know my things. Take your choice."

"All right," I said. "Give me Laddy and you can have the tree."

Mishka said nothing. He turned away and looked out of the window. Then he looked at me and his eyes were very sad.

"No," he said. "I can't let you have Laddy."

"But you said I could have anything of yours."

"I forgot about Laddy. I meant any of my things, but Laddy isn't a thing, he's alive."

"But he's only an ordinary mongrel. It isn't as if he were any special breed."

"That isn't his fault. He loves me just the same. When I'm not home he waits for me, and when I come home he wags his tail and barks with joy. No, I don't care what happens. The boys can laugh at me as much as they like, but I couldn't part with Laddy. Not even for a pile of gold."

"All right," I said. "You can have the tree for nothing."

"I don't want it for nothing. I said you can have anything of mine, and I mean it. Take my magic lantern and all the slides that go with it. You know you always wanted one."

"No, I don't want a magic lantern. I said you can have the tree."

"You went to an awful lot of trouble to get that tree."

"What of it. I don't want anything for it."

"I don't want to take it for nothing."

"But it isn't for nothing," I said. "We're friends, and that's worth a lot more than any magic lantern. The tree belongs to both of us."

Just then the train pulled in at the terminus. We had arrived. Mishka's leg had stopped hurting, but he limped a little when we got off the train.

I ran home to tell Mother I was back and then hurried over to Mishka's place.

The tree already stood in the middle of the room and Mishka was busy painting over the bare spots with green paint.

We hadn't finished decorating it when the boys began to arrive. They were very much surprised to find that the fir-tree wasn't ready.

"Fancy inviting people to a Fir-Tree party and not having the tree decorated in time," they said.

So we told them all that had happened to us that day. Mishka, of course, made it sound more exciting by saying that wolves had attacked us in the forest and we had hidden from them in a tree. But the boys didn't believe a word of it and they only laughed at us. Mishka was quite huffy at first but then he saw the joke and started laughing himself.

We had the place to ourselves because Mishka's mother and father had gone to a New Year's party next door. They had left us a big round cake with jam inside and all sorts of other good things to eat

so that we should have a real New Year's party too. With no grown-ups around the boys went quite wild. You never heard such a row! Mishka made more noise than everybody else put together. Of course I knew why he was doing it. He kept inventing all sorts of games and tricks to keep the boys from remembering about the Bengal lights.

After a while we switched on the coloured lights on the tree. Just then the clock struck twelve.

"Hurrah!" shouted Mishka. "Happy New Year!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the boys. "Happy New Year! Hurrah!"

Mishka had stopped worrying by now and looked very pleased with himself. "Now sit down, everybody," he said, "and we'll have some tea and cake!"

"What about the Bengal lights?" someone asked.

"Bengal lights?" Mishka stammered. "They're not ready."

The boys fairly howled with disappointment. "Not ready? But you promised us Bengal lights. You fooled us."

"I didn't, fellows, honest I didn't. I made some, but they're still damp."

"All right, show them to us if you've really got them. They may be dry by now."

Mishka unwillingly climbed on to a chair and took the tray off the cupboard. He very nearly fell off the chair along with his fireworks. To his surprise they were quite dry.

"There you are!" cried the boys. "They're as dry as anything. You've been pulling our legs."

"They only look dry," said Mishka. "They must be quite damp inside. They won't burn, I tell you."

"We'll see about that!"

They grabbed the little sticks and hung them up on the fir-tree.

"Wait, let's try one first," pleaded Mishka.

But they wouldn't listen to him. They got matches and before he could stop them they lighted all the fire-works at once.

There was a terrific hissing and spluttering as if the room was full of snakes. We all jumped back in fright. And then the Bengal lights burst into a bright blaze, sparkling and crackling and sending off fountains of fiery sparks. It was a real fire-work display! No, it was better than that, it was the Northern Lights! It was like a volcano erupting! It was glorious! The tree glowed and sparkled and poured silver all around it. And Mishka stood there beaming like a newly-polished kettle. At last the lights went out and the room filled with thick suffocating smoke. The boys started sneezing and coughing and rubbing their eyes. We all dashed out into the passage but the smoke came after us. There was a general rush for hats and coats.

"Where are you going?" Mishka cried. "What about tea and cake?"

But the boys coughed so hard they couldn't speak. They put on their things as fast as they could and went home. I wanted to go too, but Mishka wouldn't let me.

"Don't you go at least. Be a pal and stay. We'll have tea and cake."

So I stayed. After a while the smoke in the passage cleared, but the room was still black with it. Mishka wetted his handkerchief, tied it over his mouth and nostrils, dashed into the room, snatched up the cake and carried it into the kitchen.

The kettle was just boiling and we sat down to have some tea and cake. It was a very good cake too, with jam inside. True, it did have a sort of smoky taste, but Mishka and I didn't mind that. We ate up half of it and gave the rest to Laddy.



GARDENERS

A day or two after we arrived at the Pioneer camp last summer, Vitya, our Pioneer leader, announced that we were going to plant our own vegetable garden. We got together to discuss how to organize the work and what vegetables to plant. It was decided to divide up the garden into small plots and assign teams of two Pioneers to each plot. There would be a competition for the best plot and the winner would get a prize. The leading teams would help the lagging ones so that the soil would be thoroughly cultivated and yield a good harvest.

Mishka and I asked to be put in the same team. Before we came to camp we had agreed that we would work together and go fishing together and everything.

Vadik Zaitsev proposed having a Challenge Banner to be awarded to the team that finished the digging first. Everybody agreed and it

was decided to pass on the banner to the best planters and then to the best weeders. And the team that raised the biggest harvest would take the banner back to town.

Mishka and I made up our minds to win that banner.

"We'll win it at the start and we won't let go of it all summer and it'll go back to town with us," said Mishka.

We had been given a piece of land near the river. We measured it, marked off the plots and stuck in wooden markers with numbers on them. Mishka and I got plot No. 12. Mishka wasn't satisfied. He ran off to Vitya to complain that we had been given the worst plot.

"Why is it the worst?" Vitya asked.

"There's a hole in the middle!"

"What about it," laughed Vitya. "Besides, that's not a hole, it's a hoof-print."

"There's a tree-stump on it," grumbled Mishka.

"The other plots have tree-stumps too."

But Mishka wouldn't listen.

"It will have to be dug up," he cried.

"Well, go ahead and dig it up. If you need help the others will lend you a hand."

"Thanks, we'll manage ourselves," said Mishka huffily. "And help the others too."

"That's the spirit!" said Vitya.

Everyone started digging, Mishka and I as well. But every few minutes Mishka stopped digging to run and see how much the others had done.

"If you don't get to work we'll soon be way behind the others," I told him.

"That's all right," he said. "I'll catch up."

He started catching up, but in a little while he was off again.

We didn't get much done that day because pretty soon the dinner bell went. Mishka and I wanted to rush off to the plot after dinner, but Vitya stopped us.

"That will be enough for one day. We'll only work in the mornings. After dinner we'll rest. Otherwise some of you chaps will overdo it the first day and won't be able to work the rest of the time."

The next morning Mishka and I went off to our plot before the others and started digging. After a while Mishka asked Vitya for the tape-measure and began measuring to see how much we had dug and how much was left. After that he did a little more digging and then began measuring again. And each time he measured he found we hadn't done enough.

"Of course we haven't," I said. "Because I'm doing the digging. All you do is measure."

He threw down the tape-measure and started digging again. But he hadn't done much when his spade struck a root and he stopped digging to pull the root up. He pulled and he pulled but it wouldn't come up. He turned over the whole plot and part of the next one, trying to get it out.

"Leave it alone!" I said. "What are you bothering with it for?"

"How was I to know it was half a mile long?"

"Well, let it be."

"But it has to end somewhere, hasn't it?"

"What difference does it make to you?"

"I'm that kind of a person. If I start something I've got to see it through."

And he grabbed the root again with both hands. I got angry, went over to the root and hacked it loose with my spade. Mishka took the tape-measure and measured it.

"Look at that," he said. "Six and a half metres! Now if you hadn't cut it off it might have been twenty metres!"

I said: "If I'd known you were going to dawdle about instead of working I'd never have hitched up with you."

"Go ahead and work by yourself if you like. I'm not forcing you to work with me."

"After I've dug up most of the plot already? Nothing doing. But we certainly won't be the first to finish."

"Who says we won't? Look at Vanya Lozhkin and Senya Bobrov. They've dug even less than we have."

He went over to Vanya Lozhkin's plot and began jeering at them:

"Some diggers! We'll have to lend you a hand pretty soon."

But they drove him away. "You'd better get to work or we'll be lending you a hand."

I said: "You're a fine one, making fun of others when you've done hardly anything yourself! I'm sorry I hitched up with you."

"Don't worry," he said. "I've thought up a wonderful idea. Tomorrow we'll have the banner on our plot, you'll see."

"You're crazy," I said. "There's a good two days' work to be done on this plot, and it'll be four days if you carry on like this."

"You'll see. I'll tell you my plan later on."

"All right, but do get to work now. The ground won't dig itself."

He picked up his spade to start digging, but just then Vitya said it was time for dinner, so he threw his spade over his shoulder and led the way to the dining-room.

After dinner we all helped Vitya make the banner. We found a piece of wood for the staff, cut and sewed the cloth and painted the staff in gilt paint. Vitya wrote the inscription "Best Gardener" in silver letters on the banner. It looked very handsome.

"Let's make a scarecrow as well," said Mishka. "To keep the crows off our garden."

Everyone liked the idea enormously. We got a pole, tied a stick across it for arms, got an old sack for a shirt, and stuck an earthenware pot on top for a head. Mishka drew eyes, a nose and a mouth on the pot with charcoal and our scarecrow was ready. It did look a fright! We stood it in the middle of the garden and had a good laugh at it.

Mishka took me aside and whispered in my ear: "Here's my plan. Tonight when everyone is asleep we'll go and dig up our whole plot, all except a little bit which we can easily finish tomorrow. We're sure to win the banner then."

"If you would only work," I said. "But you keep fussing with all sorts of silly nonsense."

"This time I'll work like blazes, you'll see."

"All right. But if you don't, I won't either."

That night Mishka and I went to bed with the others. But we only pretended to go to sleep. When everything was quiet Mishka gave me a dig in the ribs. I had just dozed off. "Wake up," he said in a loud whisper. "We'd better get started or we'll have to kiss that banner good-bye."

We crept out of the dormitory, got our spades and hurried off to the plot. It was a bright moonlight night and everything stood out clearly and distinctly.

In a few minutes we had reached the plot.

"Here we are," said Mishka. "This is our plot. I can tell by the stump sticking up in the middle."

We set to work. This time Mishka really did work and before long we had dug all the way up to the stump. We decided to pull it up. We loosened the earth all around it and pulled at it as hard as we could, but it wouldn't budge. We had to hack away the roots with our

spades. It was hard work, but finally we got it out. Then we evened out the ground and Mishka tossed the stump over to the next plot.

"That's not a nice thing to do," I said.

"Where are we going to put it?"

"Not on our neighbour's plot anyway."

"All right, let's throw it into the river."

We picked it up and hauled it down to the river. It was very heavy and we had a nasty time with it. But finally we got it down to the bank and dropped it plonk into the water. It floated down the river looking like an octopus with the roots sticking out all over it. We watched until it was out of sight and then went home. We were too tired to do any more digging that night. Besides, we had only a little bit left to dig now.

The next morning we got up later than the others. Oh dear, how achy we felt! Our arms ached, our legs ached and our backs felt as if they were breaking!

"What's the matter with us?" said Mishka.

"Too much digging in one go," I said.

We felt a little better after we had moved about a bit, and at breakfast Mishka started boasting to everyone that we were going to win the banner for sure.

After breakfast we all went off to the garden. Mishka and I didn't hurry. We had plenty of time!

By the time we reached the plots all the others were busy digging away like beavers. We laughed at them as we strolled by.

"You needn't try so hard because you can't win the banner anyway!" we told them.

"You'd better get to work, you two!" they shouted back.

Just then Mishka said: "Look at this plot. I wonder whose it is. They've hardly dug anything yet. They must be at home fast asleep."

I looked at the marker. No. 12. "Why, it's our plot!"

"It can't be," said Mishka. "We've done far more than that."

I thought we had too.

"Perhaps someone has gone and changed the markers for a lark."

"No. All the other numbers are right. Here's No. 11 and there's No. 13 on the other side."

We looked again and saw a tree-stump sticking up in the middle. We couldn't believe our eyes.

"Listen," I said. "If this is our plot what's that stump doing there? We pulled it out, didn't we?"

"Of course we did," said Mishka. "A new one couldn't have grown in its place overnight."

Just then we heard Vanya Lozhkin on the plot next to ours say:

"Look, fellows! A real miracle! There was a big stump here yesterday and now it's gone. Where could it be?"

Everyone ran to look at the miracle. Mishka and I went over too.

What had happened? Yesterday they had less than half of their plot dug and now there was only a small corner left.

"Mishka," I said. "You know what? It was their plot we dug up last night. And that stump we pulled out was theirs too."

"It can't be!"

"Well, it is."

"Oh, what donkeys we are!" groaned Mishka. "What shall we do now? By rights they ought to give us their plot and take ours. All that work done for nothing!"

"Shut up," I said. "You don't want us to be the laughing-stock of the whole camp, do you?"

"But what shall we do?"

"Dig," I said. "Dig like blazes."

We picked up our spades. But when we started to dig, our poor backs and arms and legs ached so much that we had to stop. We had worked so hard on our neighbours' plot that now we hadn't the strength to finish our own.

Before long Vanya Lozhkin and Senka Bobrov finished their plot. Vitya congratulated them and handed them the banner. They stuck it in the middle of their plot. All the others gathered round and clapped. Mishka couldn't stand it.

"It's not fair!" he said.

"Why isn't it fair?" said Vitya.

"Someone pulled that stump out for them. They said so themselves."

"It isn't our fault, is it?" said Vanya. "Suppose someone wanted it for fire-wood. That's their look-out, not ours."

"Maybe someone dug it up by mistake," said Mishka.

"If they had it would be lying about here somewhere."

"Maybe someone threw it into the river," Mishka went on.

"Maybe this, maybe that. What are you getting at?" But Mishka couldn't keep quiet.

"Someone did the digging for you last night," he said.

I kept nudging him to hold his tongue. Vanya said:

"Maybe they did. We didn't measure our plot."

We went back to our own plot and started digging. Vanya and Senka stood watching us and snickering.

"Look at them," said Senka. "They're as slow as turtles."

"We'll have to lend them a hand," said Vanya. "They're way behind everyone else with their digging."

So they lent us a hand. They helped us with the digging and they helped us to pull out the stump, but we finished last just the same.

Someone suggested putting the scarecrow on our plot since we were the last to finish. Everybody thought that was a wonderful idea and so the scarecrow came to our plot. Mishka and I felt very sore about it.

"Cheer up!" said the boys. "If you do your planting and weeding well we'll take the scarecrow off your plot."

Yura Kozlov made a proposal: "Let's award it to the team that makes the worst showing with the rest of the work."

"Yes, let's!" shouted the others.

"And in the autumn we'll present it to the team with the worst crop," said Senka Bobrov.

Mishka and I decided to work hard and get rid of that nasty scarecrow, but try as we did it stood on our plot all summer long. When planting time came Mishka got everything mixed up and planted beet-roots on top of the carrot seeds. And when we did the weeding he pulled up all the parsley instead of the weeds, and we had to plant radishes instead. I wanted to quit several times but I didn't have the heart to leave a chum in the lurch. So I stayed with him to the end.

And would you believe it, Mishka and I got the banner after all. To everybody's surprise we got the biggest crop of cucumbers and tomatoes.

There was a fuss!

"It's not fair," said the others. "They were behind everybody else all the time and they got the biggest crop. How's that?"

But Vitya said: "It's perfectly fair. They may have been slower than all the rest of you but they worked the soil thoroughly and they tried hard."

Vanya Lozhkin said: "They had a good bit of land, that's what it is. Me and Senka got a bad plot. That's why we have a poor harvest although we worked hard too. And they can keep their old scarecrow. They had it all summer."

“We don’t mind,” said Mishka. “We’ll take it with pleasure.”

Everybody laughed. Mishka said: “If it wasn’t for that scarecrow we wouldn’t have won the banner!”

“How’s that?” everyone asked.

“Because it drove the crows away from our plot and that’s why we have the biggest harvest. Besides, it reminded us all the time that we had to work hard.”

I said to Mishka: “What are we going to do with that silly old scarecrow?”

“Let’s go and throw it in the river,” said Mishka.

We took the scarecrow down to the river and threw it into the water. We watched it sail down the river with its arms spread out and we threw stones into the water to make it go faster. When it was gone we went back to the camp.

That day Lyosha Kurochkin photographed Mishka and me standing on our plot beside the Challenge Banner. So if you would like to have a picture of us we shall be glad to send you one.



CUCUMBERS

Once Pavlik took Kotka fishing with him. But they had no luck that day: the fish simply wouldn't bite, so they went home. On the way, they climbed over the fence into the collective-farm vegetable garden and filled their pockets with cucumbers. The watchman saw them and blew his whistle, but they ran away. Pavlik was afraid he would get into trouble for picking vegetables from the collective-farm plot, so he gave all his cucumbers to Kotka.

Kotka came running home all excited. "Mummy, see what a lot of cucumbers I've brought you."

His pockets were full of cucumbers, he had cucumbers inside his shirt and a large cucumber in each hand.

"Where did you get them from?" asked his mother sternly.

"The vegetable plot."

"What vegetable plot?"

"The collective-farm plot down by the river."

"Who allowed you to take them?"

"Nobody. I picked them myself."

"You stole them, you mean?"

"I didn't steal them, I just took them. Pavlik took some, so I took some too."

Kotka started pulling the cucumbers out of his pockets.

"Wait a minute," said his mother. "Don't empty your pockets yet."

"But why?"

"Because you are going to take them back at once."

"Oh, but I can't take them back. They grew on the vegetable bed and I picked them. They won't grow any more just the same."

"Never mind, you'll take them and put them back where you got them from."

"I'll throw them away."

"No, you won't. You didn't plant them and take care of them, so you have no right to throw them away."

Kotka began to cry. "There's an old man there, a watchman. He whistled at us and we ran away..."

"Now, you see how naughty you are. Suppose he caught you?"

"He couldn't catch us. He's an old man."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said his mother. "That old man is responsible for the cucumbers. When they find out at the farm that all those cucumbers have gone they will blame the old man. Is that nice?"

Mother stuck the cucumbers back into Kotka's pockets and Kotka wept loudly and protested:

"I shan't go. The old man has a gun. He'll shoot me."

"It would serve you right if he did. I don't want a son who steals."

Kotka only cried the louder. "Mummy, come with me, please. It's dark outside. I'm afraid."

"You weren't afraid to take the cucumbers, were you?"

Mother gave Kotka the two cucumbers which didn't fit into his pockets and led him outside.

"If you don't put the cucumbers back you needn't come home."

She went inside the house and closed the door. Kotka started off slowly down the street.

It was quite dark.

"I'll throw them into the ditch and say I took them back," Kotka said to himself, glancing around him. "No, I'd better not. Someone might see me, and besides, the old man will get into trouble all through me."

He went down the street, sobbing. He was very scared.

"It's all right for Pavlik," he thought. "He gave me his cucumbers and now he's sitting at home safe and sound. He isn't scared."

He came to the end of the village and took the path over the field. There was not a soul in sight. He was so frightened he almost ran the rest of the way to the vegetable plot. When he got there he stopped outside the watchman's hut and began to cry. The watchman heard him and came over.

"Why are you crying, little boy?"

"I've brought back the cucumbers, Grand-dad."

"What cucumbers?"

"The ones me and Pavlik picked today. Mummy told me to put them back."

"Oh, I see," said the old watchman. "So it was you I whistled to this afternoon. You managed to pick the cucumbers after all. You little scamps!"

"Pavlik took some and I took some too. He gave me his."

"Never mind what Pavlik does, you ought to know better than to steal from the vegetable plot. See you don't do it again. Now give me the cucumbers and run home."

Kotka pulled out the cucumbers and laid them on the ground.

"Is that all?" asked the old man.

"Yes. . . . No . . . not quite. All except one," said Kotka and started crying again.

"Where is it?"

"I ate it, Grand-dad. . . . I'm sorry, I didn't mean to."

"You ate it, did you? Well, you're welcome to it, I'm sure."

"But . . . but, Grand-dad, won't you get into trouble because of me?"

"So that's what you're worried about, is it?" laughed the old man.

"No, I won't get into trouble for one cucumber. If you hadn't brought the others back I might have."

Kotka said good-bye and ran off down the path. Suddenly he stopped and called back: "Grand-dad, Grand-dad!"

"What's the trouble now?"

"Grand-dad, that cucumber I ate, will they say I stole it?"

"Now, I don't know as to that," said the old man. Then he added: "Very well, we'll say you didn't steal it."

"But. . . ."

"Let's say I made you a present of it."

"Thank you, Grand-dad. Good night."

"Good night, son."

Kotka raced across the field for all he was worth. He jumped over ditches and across the bridge and when he reached the village he slowed down to a walk. He felt very happy.



RAT-A-TAT!

Mishka, Kostya and I went to the country this summer a day before the rest of our Pioneer group moved out. We had been sent on ahead to put the place in order before the others arrived. We had begged Vitya, our Pioneer leader, to let us go because we wanted to get out to the country as soon as possible.

Vitya came along with us. They were just finishing with the cleaning when we arrived, and we set to work at once to hang pictures and coloured posters on the walls and cut out coloured paper flags which we threaded in chains and hung under the ceiling. Then we picked lots of meadow flowers and arranged them in bouquets on the window-sills. By the time we were finished the place looked very nice indeed.

In the evening Vitya went back to town. Marya Maximovna, the care-taker who lived in a little cottage next door to our house, came and offered to put us up for the night. She thought we would be afraid to sleep by ourselves in the empty house. But Mishka told her we weren't afraid of anything.

When Marya Maximovna had gone, we put on the samovar and sat on the door-step to rest while it boiled up.

How lovely it was out there in the country! There were tall rowan-trees next to the house and a row of great lime-trees, very tall and very old, over by the fence. The branches of the lime-trees were dotted with crows' nests and the crows circled over the trees cawing loudly all the time. The air was filled with the humming of cockchafers. They whizzed by in all directions. Some flew smack into the wall and dropped to the ground. Mishka collected the stunned ones and put them in a box.

The sun sank behind the forest and the clouds glowed red as if they were on fire. It was so beautiful that if I had my paints with me I would surely have painted a picture then and there with the pink clouds on top and our samovar below and the smoke curling up from our samovar chimney like the smoke from a ship's funnel.

After a while the red glow went out of the sky and the clouds began to look like grey mountains. Everything looked so different that we began to think we had landed by some magic in a strange country.

When the samovar boiled, we took it inside, lit the lamp and sat down to drink tea. Moths flew in through the open windows and danced round and round the lamp. There was something strange and exciting about sitting there drinking tea by ourselves in the quiet, empty house, listening to the faint hissing of the samovar on the table.

After tea we prepared for bed. Mishka locked the door and fastened the handle with a bit of string.

"What's that for?" we asked him.

"So the robbers shouldn't get in."

We laughed at him. "Don't be afraid, there aren't any robbers around here," we told him.

"I'm not afraid," he said. "But you never know what might happen. We'd better close the shutters too."

We laughed at him, but we closed the shutters to be on the safe side. We pushed our beds together so we could talk without shouting across the room.

Mishka said he would sleep near the wall.

"You want the robbers to kill us first, is that it?" said Kostya. "All right, we're not afraid."

But even that didn't satisfy him. Before he got into bed he brought in a chopper from the kitchen and hid it under his pillow. Kostya and I nearly burst our sides laughing.

"See you don't chop our heads off by mistake!" we told him. "You might take us for robbers in the dark."

"You needn't be afraid," said Mishka. "I won't make any mistakes."

We blew out the lamp, curled up under the blankets and began telling each other stories in the dark. Mishka was first, I was next, and when it was Kostya's turn he told us such a long and frightening story that Mishka hid his head under the blanket with terror. Kostya started knocking at the wall to scare Mishka some more and said that someone was at the door. He kept it up for so long that I got a bit scared myself and I told him to stop it.

At last Kostya stopped fooling. Mishka calmed down and went to sleep. But for some reason Kostya and I couldn't fall asleep. It was

so quiet we could hear Mishka's beetles rustling in the box. The room was as dark as the darkest cellar because the shutters were closed. We lay for a long time listening to the silence and whispering to each other in the darkness. At last a faint glimmer of light came through the shutters. Day was breaking. I must have dozed off because I woke up with a start to hear someone knocking.

Rat-tat! Rat-a-tat!

I woke Kostya.

"There's someone at the door."

"Who could it be?"

"Sh! Listen!"

For a minute all was silent. Then it came again: Rat-tat!

"Yes, someone is knocking," said Kostya. "Whoever can it be?"

We waited, holding our breath. There was no more knocking and we began to think we had dreamed it.

And then we heard it again: Rat-tat! Rat-tat!

"Sh-sh," whispered Kostya. "Let's pretend we don't hear it. Perhaps they'll go away."

We waited for a while, and then the tapping came again: Rat-tat!

"Oh dear, they're still there!" said Kostya.

"Perhaps it's someone from town?" I said.

"Who would come at this hour? No, let's lie still and wait. If they knock again, we'll ask who it is."

We waited, but no one knocked.

"Must have gone away," said Kostya.

We were just beginning to feel better when the tapping sounded again: Rat-a-tat!

I started and sat up in bed. "Come on," I said. "Let's go and ask who it is."

We crept over to the door.

"Who's there?" said Kostya.

There was no answer.

"Who's there?" Kostya repeated, louder this time.

Silence.

"Who's there?"

No answer. "Must have gone away," I said.

We went back. No sooner had we reached our beds than:

Rat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat!

We dashed to the door. "Who's there?"

Silence.

"Is he deaf, or what?" said Kostya. We stood listening. We thought we heard something rustling outside.

"Who is it?"

Nobody answered.

We went back to bed and sat up holding our breath. Suddenly we heard a rustling on the roof above our heads, and then something went crash—bang on the tin roof.

"They've gone and climbed on to the roof!" said Kostya.

Bang! Crash! Bang! This time the noise came from the far side of the roof.

"Sounds as if there were two of them," I said. "What are they doing on the roof, I wonder."

We jumped out of bed and closed the door to the next room which led to the attic. We pushed the dining-table against the door and another smaller table against that and then a bed. But the banging on the roof continued, now on one side, now on the other, now both together. There seemed to be three of them up there. And then someone started knocking at the door again.

"Perhaps somebody is doing it just to frighten us," I said.

"We ought to go out and jump on them and give them a good hiding for keeping us awake," said Kostya.

"They're more likely to give us a good hiding. There may be twenty of them out there!"

All this time Mishka was sleeping soundly. He hadn't heard a thing.

"Perhaps we'd better wake him," I suggested.

"No. Let him sleep," said Kostya. "You know what a coward he is. He'd be scared out of his wits."

As for us, we were ready to drop from sleepiness. Finally Kostya couldn't stand it any longer. He climbed into bed and said:

"I'm fed up with all this nonsense. They can break their silly necks on the roof for all I care. I'm going to sleep."

I pulled the chopper out from under Mishka's pillow and put it next to me and lay down to try and get some sleep. The noise overhead quieted down gradually, until it sounded like rain pattering on the tin roof. I fell asleep.

We were awakened by a terrific banging on the door. It was broad daylight and there was a great commotion outside in the yard. I snatched up the chopper and ran to the door.

"Who's there?" I shouted.

"Open the door, you chaps! What's the matter with you? We've been knocking for half an hour!" It was Vitya, our Pioneer leader!

I opened the door and the boys crowded into the room. Vitya noticed the chopper.

"What's that for?" he asked. "And what's the meaning of this barricade here?"

Kostya and I related what had happened during the night. But the boys wouldn't believe us. They laughed at us and said we must have

imagined it all out of sheer fright. Kostya and I were so sore we could have cried.

Just then there was a knocking overhead.

"Hush!" cried Kostya and raised his finger.

The boys quieted down. Rat-tat-tat! The rapping noise was distinctly heard. The boys looked at one another. Kostya and I opened the door and went outside. The others followed. We walked a little away from the house and looked up at the roof. Perched up there was a plain, ordinary crow. It was pecking at something, and its beak went "Tap, tap, tap," against the tin roofing.

When the boys saw the crow they burst out laughing and the crow flapped its wings with fright and flew away.

Several of the boys got hold of a ladder and climbed up on to the roof.

"The roof is covered with last year's rowans!" they shouted down to us. "That's what the crow was pecking at."

How did they get there, we wondered. Then we noticed that the branches of the rowan-trees spread over the house. In the autumn when the rowans are ripe they must fall right on to the roof.

"But who knocked at the door, then?" I said.

"Yes," said Kostya. "What were the crows doing, tapping at our door? I suppose you'll say they wanted to come inside and spend the night with us."

No one could answer that one. They all ran over to examine the door. Vitya picked a rowan up from the door-step.

"They didn't knock at the door at all. They were picking up the rowans from the door-step, and you thought they were knocking at the door."

We looked and sure enough there were some rowan berries on the door-step.

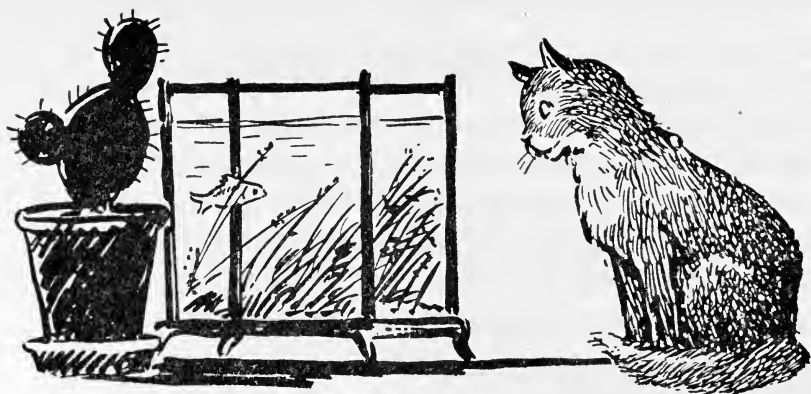
The boys had a good laugh at us. "Aren't they heroes! Three of them scared by one crow!"

"There were only two of us," I said. "Mishka slept all through it."

"Good for you, Mishka!" cried the boys. "So you were the only one who wasn't afraid of the crow?"

"I wasn't afraid at all," said Mishka. "I slept and didn't hear anything."

Ever since then Mishka has been considered the brave one, and me and Kostya, the cowards.



THE CRUCIAN CARP

Vitalik's mother made him a present of a crucian carp and a small aquarium for it to live in. It was a beautiful little fish and Vitalik was very excited about it at first—he fed it and changed the water in the bowl regularly. But after a time he lost interest in it and sometimes he even forgot to feed it.

Vitalik had a kitten, too, called Murzik, a grey fluffy kitten with large green eyes. Murzik loved to watch the fish swimming about in its bowl. He could sit for hours beside the bowl with his eyes glued to the carp.

"You'd better keep an eye on Murzik," Vitalik's mother warned him. "He'll eat up your fish one of these days."

"No, he won't," said Vitalik. "I'll see he doesn't."

One day when his mother was out, Vitalik's friend Seryozha came to see him. When he saw the fish he said:

"That's a nice little carp you've got there. I'll give you a whistle for it if you like."

"What do I need a whistle for?" said Vitalik. "I think a fish is much better than a whistle."

"No, it isn't. You can blow on a whistle, but what can you do with a fish?"

"You can watch it swimming in its bowl. And that's more fun than blowing a whistle."

"Rats," said Seryozha. "Besides, the cat can gobble up your fish any time and then you won't have a whistle or a fish either. But the cat won't eat a whistle, because it's made of iron."

"Mummy doesn't like me to swap things. She'll buy me a whistle if I want one."

"She'd never get one like this," said Seryozha. "You can't buy them in the shops. This is a real militiaman's whistle. When I go outside in our yard and whistle everyone thinks it's the militia."

Seryozha took a whistle out of his pocket and blew a piercing blast on it.

"Let me have a try," begged Vitalik.

He took the whistle and blew on it. It responded with a loud trill. Vitalik was enchanted. He longed to own the whistle but at the same time he didn't want to part with his fish.

"Where would you put the fish if I changed with you? You haven't got an aquarium."

"I'd put it in a jam jar. We have a big one at home."

"All right, take it," said Vitalik, finally giving in.

They had a hard time taking the fish out of the bowl. It kept slipping out of their hands. At last, after splashing water all over the



floor, Seryozha managed to catch it, wetting his sleeves up to the elbow in the process.

"I've got him!" he shouted. "Quick, bring me a glass of water."

Vitalik brought a mug full of water and Seryozha dropped the fish into it. Then the two friends went to Seryozha's place. The jam jar turned out to be not quite so big as Seryozha had said, and the fish had much less room than in its bowl. The boys stood watching it swimming back and forth in the jar. Seryozha was very pleased, but Vitalik felt a little sad. He was sorry he had given away his fish, and what is most important, he was afraid to tell his mother that he had exchanged it for a whistle.

"Perhaps she won't notice that it's gone," he thought as he walked home.

But as soon as he came home his mother asked him: "Where is your fish?"

Vitalik did not know what to say.

"Did Murzik eat it up?"

"I don't know," Vitalik mumbled.

"There you are," said his mother. "He waited until everybody was out, fished it out of the bowl and gobbled it up. Look at all the water splashed about! The wicked cat! Where is he? Find him at once."

"Murzik! Murzik!" Vitalik called, but Murzik was nowhere to be seen.

"He must have jumped out through the window," said his mother. "Go outside and have a look."

Vitalik put on his coat and went outside.

"Oh dear, what shall I do?" he thought miserably. "Now Murzik will get a hiding because of me."

He was just about to go back and say he couldn't find Murzik, when Murzik himself sprang out of an opening that led into the basement and ran over to the door.

"Murzik darling, don't go home," said Vitalik. "You'll get a hiding from Mummy."

Murzik purred and rubbed himself against Vitalik's leg and miaowed softly.

"Don't you understand, you silly cat?" said Vitalik. "You mustn't go in."

But Murzik wouldn't listen. He looked up adoringly at Vitalik, rubbing himself against his legs and pushing at him gently with his head as if begging him to hurry up and open the door. Vitalik tried to drag him away from the door, but Murzik insisted. Vitalik opened the door quickly, slipped inside and closed it before Murzik had time to follow him.

"Miaow!" cried Murzik from the other side of the door.

Vitalik poked his head out: "Keep quiet, you silly. Mummy will hear and you'll get beaten!"

He picked up the cat and started to push him back into the hole under the house. Murzik resisted with all four paws. He didn't want to go back into the basement.

"Get in, silly," muttered Vitalik. "And stay there."

At last he managed to push the kitten through the hole, all except his tail which still stuck out. The tail wiggled angrily for a little, then disappeared inside. Vitalik was glad: he thought Murzik under-

stood that he must sit tight in the cellar. But the next minute Murzik stuck his head out of the hole again.

"Where are you going, stupid!" hissed Vitalik, covering the opening with his hands. "Didn't I tell you you can't go home just now."

"Miaow!" cried Murzik.

"Miaow yourself," snapped Vitalik. "Oh dear, what shall I do with you?"

He looked around for something to cover the hole with. There was a brick lying on the ground near the cellar. Vitalik picked it up and stood it up against the opening.

"There," he said. "Now you can't get out. You stay there for a while. Tomorrow Mummy will forget all about the fish and then I'll let you out."

Vitalik went back into the house and told his mother he couldn't find Murzik anywhere.

"Never mind," said Mummy. "He'll come back. I shan't forgive him for this."

At dinner that day Vitalik felt very miserable. He didn't want to eat anything.

"Here I am having dinner," he thought, "and poor Murzik is sitting there in the dark cellar."

When his mother left the table, Vitalik took his portion of meat from his plate, hid it in his pocket and ran out to the cellar. He moved the brick aside and called softly: "Murzik! Murzik!"

But Murzik didn't answer. Vitalik bent down and peeped through the hole, but it was too dark to see anything.

"Murzik! Murzik!" Vitalik called. "Do come out, there's a good cat. I've got a nice bit of meat for you."

But Murzik did not appear.

"You won't? All right, you can stay there hungry," said Vitalik and went home in a huff.

At home he felt very lonely without Murzik. Besides, his heart was heavy because he had deceived his mother.

His mother saw that he looked unhappy.

"Cheer up," she said. "I'll get you another fish."

"I don't want a fish," he said.

He wanted to own up to his mother about everything but he hadn't the courage, so he said nothing. Just then there was a faint scratching noise outside the window, followed by loud "Miaow!"

Vitalik looked up and saw Murzik standing on the window-ledge. How had he got out of the cellar?

"Aha!" cried Vitalik's mother. "There he is, the rascal! Come here, you bad cat!"

She opened the little window and Murzik came in. She tried to grab him, but he must have guessed that something was wrong because he darted under the table.

"Oh, the cunning little beast," said Vitalik's mother. "He knows he's guilty. Vitalik, help me catch him."

Vitalik crawled under the table. When Murzik saw him he fled for cover under the sofa. Vitalik was glad, and though he dutifully crawled after him, he made as much noise as he could so as to give Murzik a chance to escape. Murzik sprang out from under the sofa and Vitalik started chasing him round and round the room.

"Don't make such a noise," said his mother. "You'll never catch him that way."

Murzik jumped on to the window-sill where the empty fish bowl stood and was about to jump back through the window but missed his footing and fell into the fish bowl with a great splash! The next moment

he was out, shaking himself furiously. Mother seized him by the scruff of the neck.

"Now, I'll teach you a good lesson."

"Mummy, Mummy! Please don't beat him!" cried Vitalik and burst into tears.

"Now, don't go pitying him. He didn't pity the fish, did he?"

"He isn't to blame, Mummy."

"Oh, isn't he? Who ate the fish, then?"

"It wasn't him."

"Then who was it?"

"It was me. . . ."

"What? You ate the fish?"

"No, I didn't eat it. I . . . I exchanged it for a whistle."

"For a what?"

"For this." And Vitalik pulled the whistle out of his pocket and showed it to his mother.

"You naughty boy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I didn't mean it, Mummy. Seryozha said: 'Let's change,' so I did."

"I meant you ought to be ashamed of yourself for not telling the truth. I blamed it on Murzik. Is it nice to shift the blame on others?"

"I was afraid you would scold me."

"Only cowards are afraid to tell the truth. How would you have felt if I had punished Murzik?"

"I'll never do it again."

"Well, mind you don't. I forgive you this time because you owned up."

Vitalik picked up Murzik and took him over to the stove to dry. With his wet fur sticking up all over Murzik looked more like a

hedgehog than a cat. He looked skinny too, as if he hadn't eaten for a whole week. Vitalik felt very sorry for him. He took the piece of meat out of his pocket and laid it on the chair in front of Murzik. Murzik ate it up with great zest and settled down on the chair to dry. After a while he climbed on to Vitalik's lap, curled up in a ball and began to purr as loudly as he could. The sound of his purring made Vitalik somehow feel very happy. It must have been the purring because what else could it be?



THE PISTOL

For a long time Sasha had been trying to persuade his mother to buy him a toy pistol, one of those pistols that shoot caps.

"I'm not going to let you have a pistol like that," his mother said. "It's dangerous."

"No, it isn't, Mummy," Sasha protested. "If it shot bullets it would be dangerous, but you can't kill anyone with caps."

"You may hurt somebody or knock your eye out."

"I'll shut my eyes when I shoot."

"No. I won't have it. There's no end of trouble with those toy pistols. They're not safe. You may frighten someone with it," said his mother.

And that was the end of it as far as she was concerned.

Now, Sasha had two older sisters, Marina and Ira. So he went to them and begged for a pistol.

"I want one so badly. I promise to do anything you tell me to if you buy me one."

"Oh, Sasha," said Marina. "You're a sly little thing! When you want something you're as sweet as pie, but as soon as Mother goes out you make a nuisance of yourself."

"I won't any more, honest I won't. I'll be ever so good."

"All right," said Ira. "Marina and I will think it over. If you promise faithfully to be good we might buy you a pistol."

"I promise. I'll be as good as gold. You'll see!"

The next day Sasha's sisters went out and bought him a pistol and a whole box of caps.

When Sasha saw the shiny black pistol and the box of caps he jumped for joy and ran around the room hugging it to him in great excitement.

"Oh, my darling pistol. How I love you!"

Then he scratched his name on the handle and started shooting. Before long the whole room was blue with smoke.

"Oh, do stop it for goodness' sake," said Ira. "I jump every time it goes off."

"Coward," said Sasha. "All girls are cowards."

"We'll take it away from you if you call us names," said Marina.

"All right, I'll go outside and frighten the boys with it," said Sasha.

He went into the back yard but there were no boys about. So he ran out on to the street and it is here that our story really begins. As Sasha stepped out of his back yard he saw an old woman coming down the street. He waited until she came quite close and then he fired. Bang! The old woman jumped and gave a little scream.

"Oh dear, I did get a fright!" Then she turned and saw Sasha.



"So it was you who fired? You bad boy!"

"It wasn't me," said Sasha, hiding the pistol behind his back.

"Now then, young man, you needn't tell lies. I saw you. I'm going to report you to the militia for this."

She shook her finger at him, crossed the street and disappeared round the corner.

Sasha was frightened. "Oh, oh! What shall I do? She's gone to the militia to complain."

He ran home, shaking with fright.

"What's the matter with you?"

asked Ira as he ran in panting.

"You look as if a wolf had been chasing you. What have you done now?"

"Er . . . nothing!"

"Don't tell lies. I can see you've been up to mischief."

"I haven't done anything. It's just. . . The pistol went off and she took fright."

"Who took fright?"

"The old woman who was walking down the street."

"Why did you fire?"

"I don't know. I just saw her coming and I thought it would be fun to fire. So I pulled the trigger."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing. She went to the militia to complain."

"There, you see. You promised to behave and now look what you've done!"

"How was I to know she'd be such a scarey old thing?"

"You wait, the militiaman will come after you. He'll give you what for!"

"How will he find me? He doesn't know where I live. He doesn't even know my name."

"Don't worry. He'll find you. The militia knows everything."

Sasha sat home for a whole hour looking out of the window every few minutes to see if the militiaman was coming. But no one came. After a while he calmed down a little and brightened up.

"The old woman must have been trying to frighten me."

He put his hand in his pocket to pull out his beloved pistol, but the pistol was gone. The box of caps was there, but no pistol. He tried the other pocket, but it was empty. He searched all over the room. He looked under the tables and under the sofa, but there was no sign of it. Sasha wept with mortification.

"I hardly had it at all," he sobbed. "Such a lovely pistol. And now it's gone."

"Perhaps you left it in the yard?" suggested Ira.

"I must have dropped it by the gate," said Sasha. "I'll go and see."

He ran outside on to the street, but there was no sign of the pistol.

"Of course, someone picked it up," he thought. Just then a militiaman came round the corner and made straight for their house.

"He's coming for me! The old woman must have complained after all," thought Sasha and dashed home as fast as he could.

"Well, did you find it?" asked his sisters.

"Sh!" hissed Sasha. "A militiaman is coming."

"A militiaman?"

"Yes, he's coming here."

"Where did you see him?"

"Out there in the street."

Marina and Ira laughed at him. "You little coward! Saw a militiaman outside and got scared. He's probably not coming this way at all."

"I don't care if he is!" said Sasha stoutly. "I'm not afraid of him."

At that moment steps were heard outside and the door-bell rang. Marina and Ira ran to open the door. Sasha poked his head into the passage and hissed after them: "Don't let him in!"

But Marina had already opened the door. Sure enough, there on the threshold stood a militiaman. The brass buttons on his uniform fairly shone. Sasha dropped on to his hands and knees and crawled under the sofa.

"Is this Apartment No. 6?" he heard the militiaman ask.

"No," said Ira. "This is No. 1, No. 6 is in the house next door. The one on the right."

"Thanks," said the militiaman.

Sasha heaved a sigh of relief and was about to climb out from under the sofa when the militiaman asked:

"By the way, is there a boy called Sasha in this flat?"

"Yes," said Ira.

"He's the one I want," said the militiaman and walked straight into the room.

When the girls came in they saw that Sasha had disappeared. Marina peeped under the sofa but Sasha shook his head violently and signed to her not to give him away.

"Well, and where is that Sasha of yours?" asked the militiaman.

By this time the girls were a little frightened too and they didn't know what to say.

Finally Marina said: "He . . . er, he isn't home just now. He . . . er, he went out to play."

"What do you want him for?" asked Ira. "Do you know anything about him?"

"I know all sorts of things," said the militiaman. "I know that his name is Sasha. I also know that he had a brand-new toy pistol and that now he hasn't got it."

"He knows everything!" thought Sasha in horror.

He was so nervous that his nose began to itch and before he could stop himself he sneezed.

"Who's that?" asked the militiaman in surprise.

"That's our dog," Marina said hastily.

"What is he doing under the sofa?"

"Oh, he always sleeps under the sofa," Marina went on.

"Indeed? And what is his name?"

"Er . . . Bobik," said Marina, turning red as a beet-root.

"Bobik! Bobik! Hallo there, Bobik!" called the militiaman and whistled. "Why doesn't he come out, I wonder?" He whistled again. "Doesn't want to. Funny dog. What breed did you say he was?"

"Er . . . he's . . . er. . . ." Marina couldn't for the life of her remember the name of a single breed. "He's a . . . what do you call it. A very good breed. . . . Oh, yes, a Doberman pinscher."

"That's a fine breed," said the militiaman with a broad smile. "I know that breed very well. They have long hair all over their faces."

He bent down and peered under the sofa. Sasha stared back at him, his eyes round with fright. The militiaman whistled again, this time with amazement.

"So that's your Doberman pinscher! Hey there, young man, what are you doing under the sofa? Come out. You're caught anyway."

"I shan't come out," cried Sasha.

“Why not?”

“Because you’ll take me to the militia station.”

“What for?”

“For that old woman.”

“What old woman?”

“The one I frightened with my pistol.”

The militiaman raised his eyebrows. “Whatever is he talking about?”

“He was outside playing with his pistol and an old woman was passing just as he fired and she took fright,” Ira explained.

“This must be his property then?” said the militiaman, producing a shiny new pistol from his pocket.

“That’s his!” said Ira. “Marina and I bought it for him and he lost it. Where did you find it?”

“In the back yard near your door. Now what do you mean by frightening old women with a pistol, young man?” said the militiaman, bending down to Sasha who was still crouching under the sofa.



"I didn't mean to."

"You're not telling the truth. I can see by your eyes. If you tell me the truth, I'll give you back your pistol."

"And you won't take me to the militia station?"

"No."

"I didn't mean to scare her. I only wanted to see whether she would be scared or not."

"Now that isn't nice at all, young man. I really ought to lock you up for that, but since I promised, I won't. But if I catch you doing anything like that again. . . . Come now, get out from under there and I'll give you your pistol."

"No, I'll come out when you've gone."

"You are a funny one," laughed the militiaman. "All right, I'm going."

He laid the pistol on the table and went out. Marina showed him to the door. Sasha climbed out from under the sofa, snatched up his beloved pistol and hugged it.

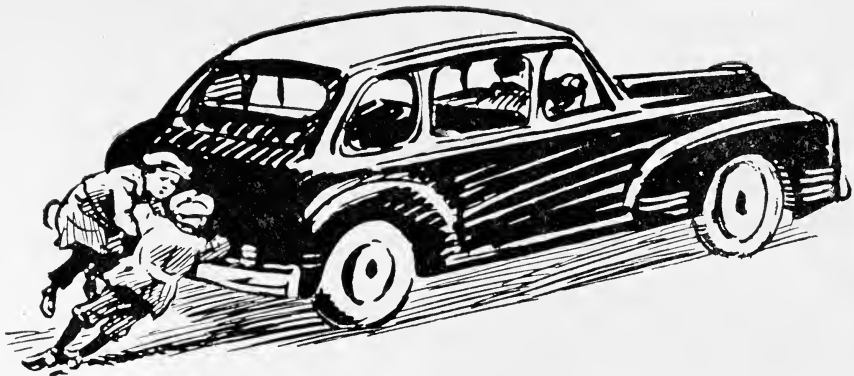
"Hurrah, my dear darling pistol. So you've come back to me after all. But how did the militiaman know my name, I wonder?"

"You wrote it yourself on the handle," said Ira.

Just then Marina came back. She pounced on Sasha at once.

"You naughty boy! When I think of all the lies I had to tell that militiaman because of you I could nearly die with shame. The next time you get into a scrape like that, don't expect me to protect you."

"I shan't get into any more scrapes," said Sasha. "I'll never frighten anyone again."



Z I S

When Mishka and I were little we wanted very badly to go for a ride in a motor car, but we couldn't get anyone to take us. We begged all the drivers we knew but they were always too busy to bother with us. One day, as we were playing in the back yard, a car drove up. The driver got out and went off somewhere. We ran over to look at the car.

"It's a ZIS," I said.

"No, it isn't, it's a Pobeda," said Mishka.

"It's a ZIS, I tell you."

"And I say it's a Pobeda. I can tell by the front."

"In the first place it's not the front, but the bonnet. Look at the back. See that luggage rack? Did you ever see a Pobeda with a thing like that?"

Mishka looked and said: "Let's get on it and have a ride."

"No," I said. "I don't want to."

"You needn't be afraid. We'll go just a little way and then we'll jump off."

Just then the driver came back and got into the car. Mishka ran to the back, climbed on the luggage rack and whispered to me: "Come on! Hurry up!"

"No, I'm not going to."

"Come on. Don't be a coward."

I ran up and hopped on beside him. The car started and before we knew it we were racing down the street. Mishka got frightened.

"I'm going to jump off!" he shouted.

"Don't you dare!" I said. "You'll get hurt."

But he kept on shouting: "I'm going to jump! I'm going to jump!" And he already put one leg down. I glanced back and saw another car coming behind us. "Stop!" I shouted. "You'll get run over."

Passers-by stopped to stare at us. A militiaman at the intersection blew his whistle. Mishka jumped off, but he didn't let go of the rack and his legs dragged along the ground. I leaned down and started pulling him up by the coat collar. I tugged and tugged until at last I got him safely back on the luggage rack.

"Now hold on tight, you silly," I shouted. Just then I heard a laugh and looked up to see that the car had stopped and a crowd had gathered. I jumped down.

"All right," I said to Mishka, "you can get off now."

But he was too scared to move. I had to pull him off. The militiaman came running up and took the driver's number. The driver got out and everyone jumped on him.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, letting children hang on behind like that!"

There was quite an argument and Mishka and I were forgotten.

"Let's clear out," I whispered to Mishka. When nobody was looking we dived into a side street and ran home. We were all out of breath when we arrived.

We did look a sight! Mishka's trousers were torn at the knees and his knees were scratched and bleeding. He got a proper scolding from his mother!

"I don't care about my trousers, and my knees will soon heal up too, but I'm sorry for that poor driver," said Mishka. "He'll get into trouble through us. Did you see the militiaman taking down his number?"

"Yes, we ought to have stayed behind and told them the driver wasn't to blame."

"I tell you what," said Mishka. "Let's write the militiaman a letter and tell him what happened."

I agreed and we sat down to write a letter. We wasted a lot of paper before we got it done. Here's what we wrote:

"Dear Comrade Militiaman,

"You took down the number of a car, and it isn't right. That is, the number is right, but it wasn't right to take it down because the driver wasn't to blame. Mishka and me are to blame. He didn't know we were riding behind. So please don't punish him because he is a good driver and it was all our fault."

We addressed the envelope as follows: "To the Militiaman at the corner of Gorky Street and Bolshaya Gruzinskaya."

We sealed the envelope and dropped it into the letter-box. We do hope he got it.

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